未踏召喚：ブラッドサイン

The unexplored summon://blood-sign

鎌池和馬
イラスト：依河和希

電撃文庫

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鎌池和馬

陸や川、大きな道路などの名前はまあ想像がつきますけど、そういえば橋の名前ってあんまり頭に浮かばないなあ、と。あれ、誰がどういう基準でつけているものなんでしょう。

【電撃文庫作品】

とある魔術の禁書目録①～㉒
とある魔術の禁書目録SS①②
新約 とある魔術の禁書目録①～⑩
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簡単なモニターです
ヴァルトラウテさんの婚活事情
未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン

イラスト・佐河和希

月刊コミック電撃大王にて『魔法科高校の劣等生 追憶編』連載の傍ら、『DOG DAYS』のアニメ版絵柄も描くマルチクリエーター、好きな寿司ネタはメサバ。

未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン

「くそっ。まさかこんな所であれを聞くだなんて」

『神々のさらに奥に潜んでいた者』さえ自由に呼び出す召喚儀礼。それを扱う最新鋭の召喚師の中でも一等の実力を持つ少年がいた。

『不敗王』、城山恭介。

その最強の少年召喚師が抱える致命的な弱点は唯一つ。

少女から発せられる『呪いの言葉』、たすけて――。

死の淵に立たされた少女、冥乃河彼岸の言葉を受け止めた恭介は、召喚師三大勢力が激突する街に身を投じる！

『禁書目録』と対をなす、鎌池和馬渾身の正統派新シリーズ!!

未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン

鎌池和馬　イラスト：依河和希

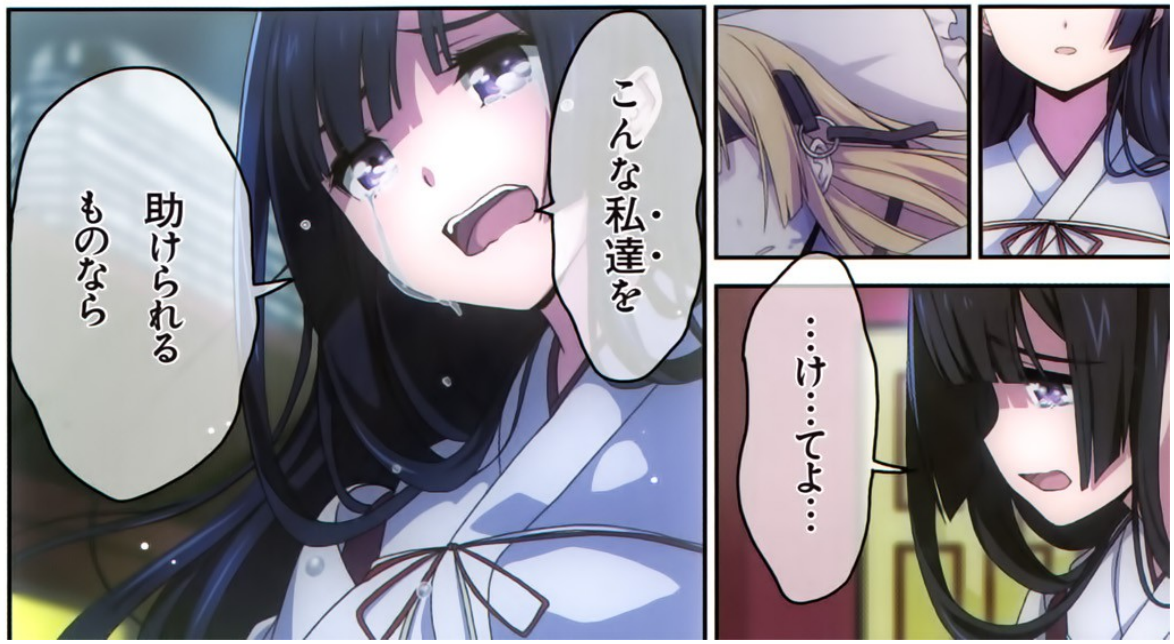
緑娘藍【リュウニャンラン】
三大勢力の一角
「イリーガル」所属の道具屋さん。
超絶ナイスバディ。
冥乃河彼岸【めいのかわ・ひがん】
三大勢力の一角『フリーダム』所属の『依代』。
コンビを組む召喚師・蓮華は双子の姉。
お兄ちゃん！
愛歌【あいか】
三大勢力の一角『ガバメント』所属の召喚師。
妹系水着猛獣少女。
未来のお嫁さんには
誰を選ぶのですか!?
は……？
何を
言っているのかな？
アナタ達は……
城山恭介【しろやま・きょうすけ】
『フリーダム』所属の召喚師……だが、
そろそろ『引退』を考えていた高校生。

あら♡
そんなの
お姉さんに
決まってるわよねぇ
ガッ
ノンノン!!
お兄ちゃんは
私のなのです!!
お姉ちゃんを
助けるため
ならぁぁぁあ!!!
わ…わわ……
私だって!
わ――!!
このメイドさん
実力行使に出たのです!!
私は巫女です!!

『召喚師』
それは命がけで
この世ならざる存在
『被召物（マテリアル）』を呼び出して
戦う者達
その『被召物（マテリアル）』の頂点
『神々のさらに奥』に潜んでいる者――
『白き女王』

アイツは
この手で倒す
この『フリーダム』アワード９０２
『不殺王（アリス（ウィズ）ラビット）』が必ずそうする

だから
言えよ
呪いの
言葉を


こんな私達を
助けられる
ものなら
…け…てよ…

助けてみなさい
よおっっっ!!!
まったく…
赤の他人を
救うために
どうしてあそこまで
出来るのかしらね
それでも
お兄ちゃんは…

戦いへと
赴くのです
仰せの通りに

Prologue

How about a quick *review*.

The simplest example is the First Summoning Ceremony that of course refers to overwriting yourself.
For example, if your daydreams go too far, they can become an uncontrollable persecution complex, right? But if you could control that power, it could be turned into extraordinary ideas. If it became a company's new project or an inventor's new invention, it could bring in a massive fortune.
No, no. This does not apply only to mental activity. Athletes and military snipers have techniques to release their brain's limiters with a war cry or by entering "the zone".
In techniques dating back to BCE, people would become an animal by covering themselves in the animal's fur or play the role of nonexistent people using special makeup or masks. But you must not look down on these methods by saying they only overwrite the contents of your mind and do not physically affect the outside world. They can sometimes produce a great enough power to do anything from elevate an individual's social status to altering the history of superpowers.
By following set steps based in definite logic, these techniques can overwrite the contents of one's mind with 100% accuracy. Even so, the term generally refers to the full methodology for achieving definite profit through those methods.
Hey☆ Thinking about it that way, doesn't summoning seem surprisingly close to home? You start to understand why the VIPs of well-known corporations hire fake-sounding fortunetellers as advisors.
Now, then.
With that groundwork laid, I have a question for you.

Something on that small a level isn't enough to satisfy you, is it?

Next is the Second Summoning Ceremony. By exciting one's own mind into a state unexplainable by normal psychology, this methodology allows you to call forth a demon from a grimoire, hold concrete negotiations with the gods of legend, or otherwise control phenomena beyond the realm of human knowledge. By using a pentagram in a circle, a lotus wand, or the rose cross

sigil, modern Western magic cabals did a lot to develop this methodology during the 19th century and the start of the 20th. And during the Cold War, the parapsychology of the Stargate Project and the former Soviet Union's secret research could also qualify at least in part. Nwa ha ha ha ha!! It could be anything from rainmaking, assassinations, or even saving the world. These are the convenient summoning techniques that people in need think of.

And in 1999, the Third Summoning Ceremony was discovered beyond that. To be honest, this is where things truly begin. Right, brother?

Facts

- On occasion, even a single love can bring an end to the world.

Opening X-01: Lazy Beginning

「あー肩凝る。おっぱいって邪魔よねえ」

「年増が黄金の鉄板ワードで挑発してきたのです!!」

(Opening X-01 Open 04/14 23:00)

オープニングX-01

気の抜けた始まり

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Ahh, my shoulders sure are stiff. Breasts really do get in the way.”
“This old woman is provoking me with the standard golden word!!”
(Opening X-01 Open 04/14 23:00)
Lazy Beginning

Now, imagine a high class 40-story apartment building. If you were to live there, where would you choose?
The top floor with a nice view?
——But I’d be afraid of a fire. And what if the elevator stopped due to a power outage?
Then somewhere near an emergency exit or staircase?
——Are you sure a robber or thief wouldn’t use the stairs to reach the apartment?
How about somewhere as close to the ground as possible?
——Any water trouble on the floors above would reach me.
In the end, there may not have been an optimum answer. Any positive came with plenty of negatives, so you would never be able to choose a room without preparing yourself to take on some negatives.
Shiroyama Kyousuke was a boy in an overly generic outfit one could find anywhere at any time of day. Namely, he wore a hooded sweatshirt and sports brand track pants. The room he entered was a top class apartment that took up two whole floors which had been opened into a single space. In fact, the roof had also been purchased with cash as an open-air park and home garden. Kyousuke was pretty sure the three-story space had some long name that took several dozen letters to spell out, but he did not remember what it was.
But as he did not live here, that was nothing to worry about.
He entered without using the intercom and the sound of the door opening and closing must have made its way inside because a girl’s voice called to him from the other end of a long hallway.
“Welcome home, bro.”
“This is not my home, we are not blood related, and we are not brother and sister. You should be saying ‘welcome’ or ‘I’m glad you made it’. And this is your home, so you need to learn how to pick up after yourself.”
After putting down the plastic bag and luggage he held in his right and left hands, Kyousuke moved toward the girl’s voice.
“I had a rough time out there. A road or bridge is out, so the traffic is in complete gridlock. And the monorail is stopped, so everywhere is crowded. …Not that any of that matters to a shut-in like you.”
The girl in question sat in a living room large enough to play tennis in.
But was she on a chair or a couch?
No.
“Ahh! You got Tropical Jewelry’s full ruby apple sherbet! You complained so much on the phone, but you really did line up for it! I love you, bro. Now, now. I’ll pat your head in thanks, so hand over the offering.”

“I don’t need your love or your humiliating animal training.”
“Ahh! You even got the apple tea they only make thirty of at morning, noon, and night! H-how much of a reward are you after here? Do you want to join me in the bath today?”
“By the way, I’m kind of scared over here! And it mostly has to do with that tiger you’re sitting on!! I’m pretty sure that violates the Washington Convention!!’
The room’s owner was sitting on a giant tiger that was five meters long. And this was not a couch made from its fur or a stuffed tiger shaped like a couch.
It was a *living tiger* lying sleepily on the ground and lazily waving its tail back and forth.
The girl puffed out her cheeks.
“Bro, this isn’t a tiger. It’s a white liger made from crossbreeding a lion and a white tiger. Its’ a super-rare species that costs at least 700 million yen a year to rent from the zoo.”
“I’m more worried about the curious look I’m getting from that monster that’s name sounds like some kind of secret weapon.”
“Roar, roar,” she said jokingly.
“Stop that! *I might be a summoner*, but a surprise attack will still kill me just fine!”
Incidentally, the girl herself was a short A-cup with her brown hair wrapped into thin braids that made large rings on either side of her head which… Oh, what a pain. One could just say she had a tricky sort of twin tail hairstyle.
However, she had another even more obvious trait.
She wore a swimsuit.
Even in mid-April, she wore nothing but a neon green bikini. No, that explanation is lacking. She wore only a neon green and white striped bikini and stayed moderately warm with the comfortable heater that was the body heat of a carnivorous animal.
Shiroyama Kyousuke held back the girl who tried to grab at and devour the limited-production dessert and he passed her a disposable wet towel and fork from the plastic bag.
“Um, Aika. I’m not about to comment on what goes on in your mind. It’s a little late for that. But can’t you at least wear underwear and normal clothes in your everyday life?’
“Do you have a problem with this?”
“That’s the entire reason I brought it up! I will admit it makes laundry easier, though!”
“Clothes… Oh, so you’re lamenting that I’m not wearing knee socks, are you? Don’t worry!! I’ve already ordered twelve different colors from the internet! Now, choose your favorite variation.”
“Wearing nothing but knee socks does not count as being dressed!! Don’t use those Award 50 level people for things like that!! So what are you

saying here? Do I have no choice but to get the help of an actual counselor at this point?”
“Stop being so shy. No guy doesn’t want a little sister in knee socks. And since I have so many, you can get carried away and eat two or three of them.”
“I’d really prefer you didn’t treat me like that liger you’re sitting on.”
The girl named Aika leaned forward from the white liger she was using as a couch and began to do battle with the snack made by carving out a raw apple and filling it with fruit and a liqueur sherbet.
“Silly bro. To be honest, the white liger’s fur is so oily that I can’t play around with it while wearing normal clothes.”
“And why did you give up on clothes for this animal?”
That may have been why Aika’s soft skin reflected the warm lights and looked oddly captivating. If she took a stroll through the savannah like that, she would probably not be attacked by a single other animal.
Now, since Aika the swimsuit beast girl was focused on the sherbet on the glass table, the chaos of the world finally began to settle down, but then another hand reached in from the side.
This hand belonged to a woman trying to swipe Shiroyama Kyousuke’s share of the apple.
She had long black hair that looked wet and she had transparently clear blue eyes. She wore a red China dress with a fair bit of extra fabric cut away and she looked like the sort of woman who would make a heavenly homeroom teacher or apartment manager.
“Out with it,” said Kyousuke. “What are you doing over there?”
“That little sister character sent me an email to brag that she had you lined up at Tropical Jewelry, so I thought I would ruin it for you by taking the leftovers before you could get them.”
“You had nothing but malice in your heart!?”
“That’s right. And I’m not a little sister character. I’m his actual little sister.”
“Keep quiet, Aika. You’ll only make this more confusing. And we aren’t blood related or any other kind of family. We’re complete strangers! And I’m supposed to be working on jobs, so why am I looking after you, *the middleman*, instead!?”
“Heh heh heh. I’m prepared to get a full bone marrow transplant so I can produce the exact same blood as you. In fact, I’ve already secretly taken a skin sample and am working with a tissue engineering specialist to put the plan in motion. I’m going to fulfill the dream and ideal held by every guy in the entire world by having the same blood in my veins but no genetic problems whatsoever! Eh heh heh heh heh heh.”
The short girl was spilling disturbing delusions from her mouth like a sticky biochemical mess regurgitated from a drain, so Kyousuke decided it was not worth replying. He simply prayed this would remain a mere delusion.

“We all know Aika is a crazy swimsuit girl, but you seem to have lost your modesty as well, Lu.”
“Oh, this?”
While shrewdly skewering the apple dessert with a fork to accurately claim it for herself, Lu Niang Lan looked down at what she was wearing. In general, it was a red China dress, but a vertical area from the center of the chest to the navel had been removed. She further increased her seductive appearance with hair decorations, a garter belt, stockings, long gloves, and other Western lace decorations. With the opening in the center of the chest and the slits on the hips, the design made one wonder just how she wore underwear.
Well, that explanation got long. But simply remembering the conclusion is enough. That being, her outfit was filled out in all the right places.
“Just to be clear, this wasn’t my choice. It’s from…what was it? Tom Jost’s new film. Ahh, they all have people firing a pair of handguns at each other with kung fu mixed in, so they all blur together for me.”
“Black Tiger?”
“That’s the one that brought ‘Hey, is the protagonist a fried prawn this time?’ into the online slang lexicon,” added Aika.
“Right, that one. Anyway, they had me dress up as one of the characters for a special campaign in Chinatown. Of course, the movie itself was shot in C Block, so they didn’t even have to put together any sets for the event. And it’s human nature to want to capitalize off of it as much as possible, so stuntmen are doing periodic action shows in the streets and blanks are being fired day and night. It’s so noisy.”
The room contained a swimsuit girl who used a wild beast as a couch and a beauty who wore a modified China dress so beautifully that she outdid a movie’s leading actress.
The two stood out so much that aliens looking for samples of earthlings would probably spot them first, but they might not have been all that rare in this city.
Someone wearing a normal outfit like a hooded sweatshirt and sports brand track pants would be buried beneath the people in this city that seemed to be attending a never-ending costume party.
The TV had been left on and some voices could be heard coming from it.
“Last month, the city of Harukawa officially admitted to economic collapse, but the privately-owned Toy Dream Company just officially announced its intentions to fully support the city. This makes Harukawa the 40th revived city around the world.”
“So we’ve finally reached #40 since the revival of Detroit in the United States. It went by so quickly. Toy Dream’s ideology is to build giant amusement parks around the world to spread smiles and vitality and the bright news they bring has become a staple in these otherwise dark times.”

“On the other hand, some people are voicing their concern that a foreign corporation is taking control of regional governments. Some of the more extreme members of the opposition claim the cities are a source of money for the CIA and act as footholds for military activity as America continues to withdraw from its overseas bases.”
“That really was fast,” casually commented Lu Niang Lan in her modified China dress while crushing the frozen apple with her plastic fork. “It wasn’t all that long ago that this city was filled with excitement over Toy Dream 35, but they’re already up to 40. Of course, this will probably be overshadowed by #50.”
“Even as the internet-addicted little sister, I can’t keep up with the passage of time. In other words, I’ll forever be 14 years old. Bro, I love you.”
The triumphant look on Aika’s face made it clear she thought that was clever, but Shiroyama Kyousuke ignored her.
“Speaking of things progressing quickly, it’s a little strange that the three of us are all here together. Especially you two. Before, you had set aside your normal jobs of exterminating monsters and sealing ancient texts and were instead *trying to kill each other with friendly smiles on your faces*.”
“What are you talking about, silly bro? As Alice (with) Rabbit, you were doing more damage than either of us and with a completely nonchalant look on your face too.”
“No, no, no. Don’t be ridiculous.”
“Yes, that really was quite bad,” said Lu Niang Lan. “The stupid swimsuit girl was bad enough, but Kyousuke was something else entirely.”
“I don’t want to hear that from an old woman who’s past her prime but still gets by with hidden weapons and not a hint of the occult,” said Aika. “It probably took many long years to get that kind of skill.”
“Ahh, my shoulders sure are stiff. Breasts really do get in the way.”
“This old woman is provoking me with the standard golden word!! Liiiigerrrrr!!!!”
“Heh heh heh hah hah. That cute pet might be *an excellent beast and an excellent vessel*, but I’m confident I can destroy five of its vital points before you can snap your fingers. Please don’t underestimate the Perfect Dragon, okay? Being flat as a board is one thing, but it’s painful to look at a washboard whose ribs are poking out. Also, who are you calling an old woman?”
An aura of lightning exploded between the two of them, so Kyousuke considered sneaking away to safety. His apple sherbet had already been taken, a five meter beast was about to go on a rampage, and a boldly smiling young woman was claiming she could take out those five meters on her own, so staying seemed like an all-around bad idea.
“Not so fast, bro. And what kind of brother abandons his sister less than a second into the battle?”
“Aika, I already finished the errand you gave me, so I’d like to go home and get some sleep.”

“Liger.”
The bikini girl snapped her fingers and her couch moved. It lightly bit the neck of his sweatshirt like a mother cat carrying its kitten and that was enough to quiet Kyousuke down.
With her couch gone, Aika sprawled her upper body across the glass table.
“That errand was of course just an excuse. Don’t forget that I have something important to discuss with you.”
“And what’s that?”
“You have the nickname Alice (with) Rabbit and yet for some crazy reason you say you’re washing your hands of the summoning business. What else would it be about, silly?”
“Dah dah, dah dah, dadalah dadadadadah♪”
“Wait, Kyousuke. Why are you humming intro music and pulling out a small convenience store cake?”
“To celebrate my graduation from the summoning business, of course.”
“But buying your own cake is just too sad!!” exclaimed Lu Niang Lan. “And that had better be a joke! In fact, if you are retiring, then I’ll take you for myself!!”
“He’s mine! And if he falls for anyone else, I’ll brand his face with the Aika symbol. That’ll be a constant reminder of who he belongs to!!”
“If I can get my hands on Alice (with) Rabbit through simple romance, don’t think I won’t go all out! You’ll see what happens when an adult woman switches back on the romance she banned herself from after realizing she was a stalker in the making. Does the water in your water bottle taste funny? That’s because it’s my leftover bathwater! Hah!!”
“Please stop!! You’re both creeping me out!!!”
Kyousuke, the boy with a dangerous nickname, gave a girly scream.
“Besides, I consulted both of you about this half a year ago. I’d reached the end of one incident and I had lost the vessel I use for summoning. It’d be more accurate to call it a graduation, though. Anyway, I said I would completely wash my hands of the summoning business if I didn’t come across a new vessel over the next half year.”
“Uuh… You did promise that, didn’t you?”
“Today is the end of that half year limit, but there isn’t a new vessel by my side. So that’s that. I may be called a summoner, but I can’t summon anything without a vessel, so there’s no point. And it’s not like I was driven by a goal like becoming the greatest summoner or exploring the possibilities of as-yet-unseen Materials.”
“That’s actually strange in itself. How did you manage reach such a high level when you’re so noncommittal and have no special motivation?”
“How should I know? I had no choice but to save someone every time I heard the cursed word. And next thing I knew, people were using that weird nickname. I didn’t do anything more than that.”

“That’s what makes you so exciting. …And it’s a huge help that you’ll come make your little sister’s food and wash her swimsuit every day when she uses that cursed word.”
“Actually, you need to start doing that on your own. I’m retiring, remember? So…”
Just as he started to continue, the white liger gently biting the neck of his sweatshirt let go and growled.
“Come to think of it, the liger’s been really agitated since you got here,” said Aika with a tilt of her head. “Bro, did you stop for fried chicken or pork buns on the way here?”
“Oh, I think I know what that’s about.”
With that, Kyousuke left the room.
The other two assumed he had gone to get something from the hall or entranceway, but another possibility soon entered the back of their minds.
What if he was casually making a run for it?
Aika and Lu Niang Lan frantically ran into the hallway, but they tripped over something and fell.
They then checked on what had tripped them.
Some large object lay in the center of the long, wide hallway.
It was covered with crudely applied bandages that were oozing blood and they soon recognized it as *an unconscious shrine maiden.*
Her limbs were sprawled out in what was not quite lying face up and not quite lying face down, but despite the painful-looking position, the shrine maiden did not move an inch. Her long hair was more blonde than brown and it was accented with what first appeared to be a leather hairband. However, a closer inspection showed it was a blindfold. Similarly, what looked like a necklace was actually a bit like the ones placed in a racehorse’s mouth.
“You called that thing a white liger, right? I thought the smell of blood might excite it, so I wasn’t sure what to do about this.”
“B-bro brought another girl to my hou- bgyhh!?”
“Who is this girl?”
The beauty in a modified China dress asked that question after physically nipping a commotion in the bud.
Kyousuke shrugged.
“I found her collapsed while out on Aika’s errand and she said “*help*”, so I guess you could say I couldn’t help myself.”
“Oh, I see.”
Lu Niang Lan’s response contained a complicated undertone. It was a mix of understanding and resignation. As she rubbed her index finger against her temple, Kyousuke concluded his explanation.
“I don’t want to leave anything undone, so this will be my final job as a summoner. I will protect the life and lifestyle of this girl who asked for help. I should be able to manage that without a vessel.”

Facts

- There are techniques known as summoning ceremonies and there are summoners who use those techniques.
- The residents of other worlds are generally known as Materials. They are viewed as “a threat used as a tool that does not need a will of its own”.
- Especially powerful summoners gain nicknames. Most of those are popularized by third parties, so the actual summoner does not decide on the name. However, some rookies will spread one themselves to make a name for themselves.
- A summoner and a vessel act as a single set. Normally, both roles are filled by humans, but there are some exceptions like Aika and her white liger.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke is weak to serious requests for help.

Opening X-02: Tense Beginning

(始まる……)

(召喚師同士の戦いが。最悪のタイミングで!!)

(Opening X-02 Open 04/14 22:25)

オープニングX-02

気の抜けぬ始まり

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

(It's beginning.)
(A battle between summoners. And at the worst possible time!!)
(Opening X-02 Open 04/14 22:25)
Tense Beginning

Let us move back in time a little.
Let us return to the instant that certain twin shrine maidens realized they had failed.
"Dammit!!"
International Revived City – Toy Dream 35. Former name: Natsumi. After letting a massive foreign corporation take care of its economic collapse, all of the city's administrative authority had been handed over and it had been reborn as a giant profitable amusement park filled with the dreams of children and the hopes of adults. This new standard had spread beyond just America and Japan to reach every continent.
In the harbor on the coast, the never-ending expanse of the dark sea seemed to symbolize the night and death.
This was the entrance for the materials needed to support the amusement park that was an incarnation of mass consumption. Like a hole in the bright festival that was covered in decorative lights and fireworks, this one spot was ruled by darkness. And that darkness that counterbalanced the ever-consuming city was a battlefield for two girls.
Meinokawa Renge.
Meinokawa Higan.
They both had smooth skin and long, straight, and glossy hair. They both wore the scarlet hakama of a Shinto shrine maiden, but while Renge had the stereotypical black hair and pale skin of a shrine maiden, Higan had blonde hair and blue eyes that contradicted that stereotype.
And they also had different roles.
Renge was a summoner and Higan a vessel. Both were necessary for the summoning ceremony.
Renge muttered to herself as if growling like a beast.
"We screwed up. …Or was this what they were planning from the beginning? Either way, this is dangerous. Higan, don't think about fighting! The job doesn't matter anymore. We need to escape to safety!"
"R-Renge, um, what do you mean this is what they were planning?"
Despite her sister's hesitant question, Renge did not have time to explain.
It was supposed to have been a simple job.
The ghost of a "white woman" was supposedly appearing in Toy Dream 35's harbor. In the world of summoning ceremonies, that usually meant a gathering of power had been left wandering due to a few overlapping circumstances. Whether it was physical or a kind of data, it was common knowledge to summoners that the soul existed. And if some kind of conditions were thrown off, an error could occur and the soul of the dead

would lose its destination. It would be stuck in this world like rainwater gathering in a drain clogged with leaves.
And in most cases, a summoner would not even need to fight. If they simply made their way to the location and prepared to summon something “not of this world”, the ghost would disappear on its own as if the clog had been removed. It was unknown whether it was simply a phenomenon being destroyed or if the soul really did go to heaven, but it did resolve the paranormal phenomenon. Compared to making use of all their secrets to ruthlessly battle other summoners, exterminating ghosts or monsters and sealing ancient texts were like odd jobs to earn some extra money. It was much like the bamboo hat-making side job of a ronin.
But this should not have happened.
The instant the clash began, all of the disposable summoners – including the Meinokawa sisters – thought the same thing: we failed.
(Like hell there was a “white woman”. This was actually a way of checking on their enemies. You could call it forced reconnaissance. I don’t know who’s behind this, but they’re trying to judge their true strength by seeing how many of us they can defeat. I should have suspected something when so many freelance summoners were gathered in one place!!)
The entire asphalt ground shook.
While hiding behind a giant warehouse, the sisters began to sweat when they realized what had caused the shaking. They could see the gantry cranes used to lower containers from cargo ships, but several objects twice their size were slowly moving through the harbor. Yellow and green light indicated the location of the monsters’ eyes in the darkness and the great height of those eyes was enough to fill the girls with fear.
And they were not optimistic enough to think these had been summoned by their allies.
“Renge, those are…Fafnir and um, uh, Yamata no Orochi…aren’t they?”
“Dammit. They’re summoning Divine-class Materials!?”
Monsters of such high purity and power did not simply appear on their own. Long ago, people had believed the gods could appear anywhere and at any time, but once it was all calculated out, the places and conditions for them to descend were so few it had left the religious leaders speechless. There was only one possibility here.
This was the work of summoners. Those monsters had undoubtedly been artificially called in with a summoning ceremony.
But these giant dragons did not swing their arms, try to bite, or spew flames or poison from their mouths.
They simply extended their bodies and collapsed forward.
It was a very simple attack, but that was exactly what made it so difficult to avoid. It was the same principle as a giant’s hand swatting at a fly.
However, the result of this simple action was massive.
At the center of the blast, warehouses, piles of containers, and cranes flew up into the air. A wave several meters tall traveled through the thick

asphalt ground like it was a liquid. But even if one saw that wall approaching, there was nothing they could do about it.
Renge and Higan were thrown into the air like a charging bull's horns had jabbed them from below.
At the same time, the giant warehouse they had been hiding behind began to collapse because its entire foundation had been destroyed.
The sisters did not have time to worry about what had happened to the other freelance summoners who had been the target of that attack.
Renge's back slammed into the ground and she grabbed and tugged on the shrine maiden outfit of Higan who was gasping and having trouble breathing. They had to move as far away from the collapsing warehouse as they could.
(I won't let her die here.)
Renge clenched her teeth that tasted of iron and dragged Higan behind her.
(My sister means the world to me, so I won't let some people I've never even seen crush her as some disposable pawn!! We will escape here. We will! I'll do whatever it takes to ensure that!!)
"Higan! Stand up! Force yourself if you have to, but gather strength in your legs!"
If they crossed the fence three hundred meters ahead, they could escape the harbor. However, there was no cover along the way, so they would be out in the open. There were plenty of lights and they would be spotted right away if they approached carelessly, so they needed to find some other route or method.
"R-Re-Renge… Um, how many Incense Grenades do you have?"
"I have three left. I used too many at the beginning. You counted them with me before, remember? And they aren't biscuits in your pocket, so there aren't going to be more of them when you count them again."[1]
"Th-then…"
Higan was still gasping for breath, perhaps because of all the fear and confusion filling her.
"We can only begin a battle three more times?"
"Look how many summoners they have on a high enough level to bring out Divine-classes. It doesn't matter how many we had, it still wouldn't be enough. I said not to think about fighting, remember? If we don't focus on slipping past them, we'll be cornered in no time."
Each of them was a powerful soldier, but an overwhelming army was attacking them. Meanwhile, they were forced to lament their lack of ammunition. It was just like a hopeless scene from an old war movie. If they did not shift their goal from "defeating the enemy and winning" to "surviving", nothing but a heroic death awaited them.
A low tremor filled the air once more.
The Meinokawa sisters held their breath and checked their surroundings, but fortunately, they had not been noticed by Fafnir, Yamata no Orochi, or the other giant dragons who towered more than a head above everything

else. The monsters were slowly moving in a distant area, but that meant some of their allies were on the receiving end of that fierce attack.
Higan's face grew pale and Renge heard her mutter something under her breath.
"(Oh, White Queen who guides us to victory in extraordinary battles, please reach out to this fragile human soul. I-I'll eat the bell peppers I don't like and I'll do what my sister tells me, so…)"
That good luck charm was not uncommon in their business. The unsophisticated behavior of her sister reminded Renge of something.
She had vowed to do whatever it took to let her precious sister escape.
She bit her lip at what she had promised herself and only bit down harder as time passed.
"Summoners can speak with the gods in more ways than prayer. Let's go, Higan."
"Wh-where?"
"Back home, of course. And now you definitely have to overcome your dislike of bell peppers."
With that answer, Renge lowered down to hide behind the wreckage of the warehouse and she began to move once more. She was already picturing the layout of the harbor. She had an idea of a safe exit, but it was a fair distance away: 1.3 kilometers. They would have to cut across almost the entire harbor. If they did so at random, they would be found almost instantly, but they could ensure their survival by advancing cautiously as if passing through the eye of a needle.
They moved in quick bursts as if leaping from pile of rubble to pile of rubble.
They avoided the light and did their best to blend into the shadows.
When a suspicious figure – most likely an enemy summoner – passed by within two meters of them, they desperately held their breaths and waited for them to leave.
With her throat stinging from the tension and a hand over her sister's mouth, Renge slowly but surely approached the exit.
But then she heard some nearby rubble collapsing.
In the street lights, she could see large objects littering the ground here and there. One looked like a giant dinosaur egg, one like an adult who had collapsed and was futilely moving his arms and legs like a clockwork doll, one like a dead tree, one like a doll trying to start an invisible engine with its mouths hanging half open, one like ice cream fallen to the ground, and one like a woman sitting on the ground and muttering to herself.
These were the "losers".
Summoners fought by calling in Materials which were beings not of this world. Those Materials had godlike power, but if they were defeated before your eyes, a shock on the level needed to kill a god would be carved into your heart. That was the despair of seeing the end of a legend or the end of the world. People were unable to make the obvious decision to fight it and

they could do nothing more than stare blankly at the approaching wall of calamity.
They had not passed out.
They were conscious, but they could not move.
An old phrase referred to the mummy hunter becoming a mummy, but this may have been closer to becoming a zombie. They would slowly continue their meaningless actions and they would slowly obey anyone who gestured simple instructions to them. It was a disturbingly ironic fate for those who controlled such powerful beings.
Medically, it was much like the state that anyone fell into after a stun grenade's intense flash and sound went off nearby. But while that state of not knowing if they were alive or dead lasted for only a dozen or so seconds, this complete lack of understanding lasted for over a day. There was no room for overcoming it with empty ideas like "fighting spirit" or "hard work". The basic structure of the human mind simply could not endure it.
But that alone was not enough to kill them and sometimes they would be spared, but could they expect that kind of mercy from the enemy who was thoroughly mopping up every intruder in the harbor?
The enemy could kill them at any time and they would not resist or protest if someone pulled on their hand and led them into a blast furnace that boiled metal, so the victors were focusing on exterminating those that could still move.
The enemy would kill them when they happened across them or after all of the fighting was over. And it would be as easy as crushing a raw egg someone had left on the side of the road.
"(R-Renge…Renge! We need to help them before they're found!!)"
"(We can't, Higan! We can't run around carrying people right now!!)"
The losers would follow anyone's gestured instructions or anyone who tugged on their hands, so the sisters could guide them by tying a handkerchief to a stick and waving it. However, moving with so many people would stand out too much. They would practically be asking the enemy to kill them.
Higan almost rushed out without thinking, so Renge quickly moved to stop her.
However, something else happened first: a bloody hand reached out and weakly grabbed Higan's shrine maiden hakama.
"Don't… You will…end up just like them…"
It was a middle-aged man in a worn-out suit. There was no need to ask which side he was on. They had not noticed him yet because he had been hiding in the shadows and his legs had been crushed by the rubble of a collapsed warehouse.
"You lost too?"
"I quickly got rid of my Material so I didn't end up like them, but that means I lost my protection too. I freed my mind, but I was caught in the rubble. My vessel is *in there* too."

Higan looked up at the mountainous silhouette with despair in her eyes.
The middle-aged summoner gave a self-deprecating laugh.
“Guard of Honor.”
“What?”
“That’s what they call themselves. They’re willing to exterminate us to hide any information on them, so I think spreading that term is a way to get back at them. …Tell your client. I’m sure that name is just that important.”
“Guard of Honor?”
Renge frowned.
In its standard use, that term referred to special soldiers gathered for extravagant parades. However, they could be viewed both as the soldiers gathered for a ceremony and the soldiers who carried out a ceremony.
When both summoners and vessels were using the name, it was difficult to say which meaning was being emphasized.
And they did not have time to sit around thinking about it.
A tremendous impact rang out in the distance.
It was the roar of a giant dragon using its body to crush someone.
Not only did another wave run through the broken ground around the center of the blast, but the few remaining buildings and the piles of rubble collapsed. The sisters were thrown into the air and began to choke as their backs hit the ground.
And once they recovered, that man was nowhere to be seen.
The giant maw of rubble had swallowed him up and all that remained was a dark red liquid dripping from the cracks.
This was reality.
The nightmare was not over yet and they were not just going to wake up.
“Cough, cough. Oh, White Queen, please watch over the path of this lost human soul.”
“Higan, we don’t have time to pray for every person who dies! Damn, they’re coming this way!!”
A moment later, something was thrown from behind cover and toward Higan. It was a cylindrical metal can the size of a hairspray bottle.
“An Incense Grenade!?”
Renge had no time to spare.
She too sprang out into the cold light just before the can exploded.
But unlike a normal grenade, no explosive blast or fragments tore into Higan. Instead, a transparent mist sprayed out over the area. The harbor air that smelled of oil quickly changed to the air next to a clear mountain stream.
At the same time, complex symbols of light were drawn on the road in the center of the blast and dim pale light filled the area. Even someone with little knowledge in the field would understand that this was a type of magic circle carefully calculated out using a system of occult techniques. It was known as an Artificial Sacred Ground.
It was also a cage.

This field was cut off from everything else to allow for large-scale and high-purity summoning ceremonies. Objects and normal people were ignored as the twenty meter square cage accurately enclosed only the summoner, the vessel, and the individual set as their target.
(It’s beginning.)
Meinokawa Renge accurately grasped the situation.
Something had changed. At some point, two people had appeared in the center of the blast. They were both white women wearing red and black riding suits. The one in black had a thick collar around her neck.
The collar was the same as the blindfold on Higan’s forehead and the bit around her neck. A vessel always wore symbols of bondage. That was to prevent a vengeful or evil spirit that had not been summoned from taking control of their mental state from the outside.
(A battle between summoners. And at the worst possible time!!)
Renge reached into her shrine maiden outfit’s pocket and scattered a bundle of Japanese paper through the air. They whirled through the air and quickly formed a hard stick about 180 centimeters long.
However, that was the most magic a single human could accomplish.
They could not shoot fire from their hands or fly through the sky on a broom. Producing a magic wand with no tricks up their sleeve was the limit.
And that was exactly why those fragile humans relied so heavily on the higher beings that possessed great power.
“Higan! Get ready!!”
As she shouted, the riding suit pair also moved. One of the glamourous beauties swung an arm horizontally and controlled sand to create a two meter rod.
(Uniquely Selfless?)
Renge frowned at the words carved into the side of the long rod.
(I’ve never heard that nickname before, but I doubt a rookie trying to make a name of herself would appear here. Is this a hidden player who doesn’t show up in the official awards!?)
Meinokawa Renge and Uniquely Selfless made gentle strokes with the long rods in their hands and the color red trailed after the moving tip like a car’s tail light.
The name changed depending on religion, but among professional summoners, this was simply known as the Blood-Sign.
Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground cut off by the Incense Grenade, something like a hologram appeared between the Meinokawa sisters and the riding suit pair. At first glance, the object looked like a die with colorful patterns on its sixty centimeter sides, but it was not.
It was a gathering of spheres of light that were as big as apples and as red as blood.
These were the crimson Petals that were divided between low, middle, high, and lowest sounds. All 216 Petals were gathered in what summoners called a Rose. These girls in Japanese clothing had little connection to it, but the

Rose had its roots in a symbol of Western magic that used a rose emblem to conceal the secrets of summoning archangels.
The appearance of the Rose acted as a signal.
Three spheres of white light suddenly appeared near Renge and the beautiful woman known as Uniquely Selfless. These spheres of light were distinct from the previous ones and they were known as White Thorns. No one there questioned their appearance. They simply gathered strength in their right hand which held the long rod known as a Blood-Sign, supported it with two fingers of their extended left hand, used all their strength by transferring the rotation of their legs and hips to the rest of their body, and forcefully jabbed the tip into one of their White Thorns.
The Rose was struck from both sides and it scattered in every direction. The Petals emitting crimson light were sent every which way. Those spheres of light contained the elements of various sounds, divided between low, middle, and high. They bounced off the ground, walls, rubble, and edges of the Artificial Sacred Ground, but they passed right through the Meinokawa sisters and the riding suit beauties. That was because they were not actually physical objects.
There was no need to stop their movement.
Renge jabbed with her Blood-Sign and its tip almost seemed to be drawn in toward the second glowing White Thorn floating near her.
A change had come over the battlefield.
As soon as the box-shaped Rose had fallen apart, Spots had appeared across the space isolated by the Incense Grenade. They appeared on the ground, the walls, in the gaps between the rubble, and in midair. These fist-sized holes would cause something to “fall” into it no matter what direction it contacted it from and there were thirty-six in all. Renge looked around in search of them.
(Fourteen. Damn, so over half of them are hidden!!)
Meanwhile, one of the ricocheting crimson Petals contacted one of the many Spots and fell inside.
All of the Petals had a single letter of the alphabet carved into it in accordance with a certain set of rules. Even from a distance, a summoner could intuitively feel the “meaning” just from seeing the light.
The low sounds were b, c, d, f, g, h, and j.
The middle sounds were k, l, m, n, p, q, and r.
The high sounds were s, t, v, w, x, y, z.
The lowest sounds were a, i, u, e, and o.
The twenty-six letters of the alphabet had the five vowels removed as the lowest sounds and the remaining twenty-one were split into the three categories of low, middle, and high.
Renge had knocked the high sound “s” into a Spot.
This was where the battle truly began.
“It’s starting! Higan, keep strong!!”
“R-right. Got it. Um, I’ll do my best!”

Before Higan had finished speaking, the change began.
Summoners called in Materials, life forms that did not exist in this world, by having them possess the physical body of a vessel. Once the Material was temporarily fixed there, it could be used. That was a simple overview of the system.
With a sticky sound, Meinokawa Higan's body and the shrine maiden outfit she wore both changed form. She became a three meter mass of sticky liquid with the unnaturally yellow coloration of some sodas. This form was thoroughly unpleasant, hideous, and blasphemous. Floating deep in the transparent slime was a smooth one-meter human form known as the Silhouette.
That was Meinokawa Higan.
She was the Silhouette used to hold the monster in this world. Everything else was a decoration and crushing that Silhouette would end it all in a single strike.
(The Original Yellow (s), costs one high sound. And the enemy chose…)
She heard a similar sound, but it was an unhealthily red mass that created a spiral next to the beauty known as Uniquely Selfless.
(A low sound? Damn!! At this rate, we'll be taken out by the circular relationship!!)
Renge immediately switched over her thoughts.
Basically, if she hit the sound spheres into the Spots using her White Thorns, the number and arrangement of the sounds would transform the Material. Ignoring the lowest sounds, the low, middle, and high sounds had a circular relationship much like rock-paper-scissors. If they were at a disadvantage, they only needed to switch to a different range of sound or a different individual Material.
Of course, during a deadly battle, the enemy was not necessarily going to sit idly by and let that happen.
(Tch! She's good. This goes beyond simple technique. She's predicting everything I try to do!!)
Both Renge and the Guard of Honor assassin sent out White Thorns. Each time one struck a Petal of the different categories of sound, complex blood-red lines would be drawn through the air and the various sounds of the Petals landing in the Spots would reach their ears. Like someone randomly messing with piano keys or guitar strings, it created a primeval song of destruction that filled anyone who heard it with confusion. The intense dance of light and sound caused the bizarre Materials to change form again and again.
They became a stuffed animal holding a bloody axe, a giant stag beetle that's legs and pincers had been torn off by a mischievous child and who had wheels and razor blades attached in their place, or a massive gear that could roll around on its own.
The White Thorns floating in the air were replenished at ten second intervals, so they could be fired off quite quickly if necessary.

Renge interpreted this as a way of carving out a name.
The supernatural was brought in by calling its name. Every part of the world had traditions about not using a god's name in vain or using code words when speaking about fairies. That had been raised to the level of a ceremony when the Sigil of modern Western magic had created a charm for summoning angels by laying a thin sheet of paper over a special diagram of the alphabet and drawing lines to connect together the name of the angel to be summoned.
The modern summoning ceremony had taken that a step further.
This was not contained to one's mind.
Nor did it leave it up the gods to decide if they would come.
It was a methodology to summon legendary beings into the real world with 100% certainty. The god was not assisting a human; the human was having the god obey him.
(Honestly, it's like asking for divine punishment. We go beyond our own minds and physically draw out the Materials floating on "the other side" so we can directly use them!!)
Modern summoners used their White Thorns and the low, middle, high, and lowest Petals to freely control those non-standard monsters within the limited space of the Artificial Sacred Ground.
The trick was how to use the Blood-Sign and White Thorns that determined what happened.
No matter how advantageous a sound range you tried to give your Material, your disadvantage would never end as long as the enemy stayed one step ahead of you in transforming their own Material into the sound range that was your Material's weakness.
Sometimes the enemy would accurately knock Petals into Spots and sometimes she would use her Petal to knock Renge's Petal off of its course.
The riding suit woman had more than one method and she fluidly switched between them.
And meanwhile…
"Ohhhh

And while this happened, the minds of Meinokawa Higan and the summoned Material were in constant conflict.
<Gh…,kh!! I can’t…keep my aim straight!!>
By their very nature, vessels could not fully control the Material’s body. This was true even of the colorful slimes with a cost of only one.
The Materials themselves had certain desires that drove them: the desire to devour flesh, to suck blood, to crush everything in sight, or to smash everything after petrifying it.
The vessel could not stop those desires. All they could do was try to control the aim by choosing who those desires would be directed at.
With a single Material, it might have been easy to determine how they acted and work something out.
But things were different when the Material was changing every few seconds. If the vessel did not say focused, their mind could be tossed around and they would let loose indiscriminate destruction in their confusion.

<But I will do this. I'll line up the cursor of my mind and…um…ride that wave through to the end! I won't waste the Material – the opportunity – that my sister summoned!>
Currently, Meinokawa Higan's physical body had taken the form of a squid large enough to crush a patrol boat in its grasp. Its name was DEC Tentacle (nu – o – re – a – btv – ag – y). Its yellow eyes glowed as it used the ten thick chains it had in place of tentacles to grab the enemy Material.
A great roar burst out.
A giant arm was growing from the ground like a tree. This was Guard of Honor's Material named Tree Hand (tzf – qux – o – alc – a – ge) and it struggled against the chains binding it. Once it shook the chains loose, they crashed down from directly above Meinokawa Renge. They were as thick and heavy as the anchor that held a super-heavy tanker in place. That weight and speed alone would have made a strike powerful enough to slice a midsized truck in two.
<Renge!?>
(Stop shouting in my head. I have my protective circle, so I'll be fine either way.)
Sure enough, Renge was unharmed as she stood within the asphalt dust.
Traditional summoning techniques involved two especially important circles. The most obvious was the summoning circle itself, but the protective circle that guarded the summoner was also important.
With modern summoning ceremonies, the top priority while using a Material's power was to prevent the summoned monster from interfering with the ceremony. The circle's effects could be divided into two major categories: stopping all external elements and preventing the summoner from collapsing mid-ceremony due to internal elements such as lifespan or illness. (i.e. in the unlikely event that the protective circle was pierced from outside, the summoner would not die. It could happen the instant the circle was released, though.) In either case, it was less like the monster was taking pity on the human and more like a computer's emergency power supply. It simply let the summoner safely end the ceremony before they collapsed. Only the human controlling the monster's existence as part of the ceremony would be protected and only so they could guide the ceremony to completion.
As such, a battle between summoners came down to the clash between the Materials they had summoned. They could swap out or strengthen their Materials, but they could not interfere any more than that and they could not directly kill the opposing summoner. For better or for worse, they could only continue to watch within the protective circle.
Yes.
As long as the Material continued to live and function, that is.
(Even so, this is bad. Really, really bad!!)
Renge clenched her teeth while hitting away her White Thorns with her Blood-Sign.

She could not relax just because she had the protective circle. It felt just as nerve-racking as diving down to the pitch-black depths of the sea in a small submarine made of thin glass. Materials were superior to humans by definition and a human alone could not avoid or defend against their attacks. In other words, the summoner's death was unavoidable if the thin glass that was the protective circle broke. If another attack arrived after they had already lost and been put into the clockwork doll state of mind, they would undoubtedly be killed in a way more gruesome than being crushed by the water pressure of an ocean trench.

"…"

Renge shuddered as a vision of loss filled the back of her mind. She saw an attack powerful enough to kill the gods hitting her head-on and she saw herself and Higan curled up and trembling in the fetal position. Would the enemy crush them instantly or would they take advantage of the summoner and vessel's nonresistant zombie-like state to lead them to some cruel public execution?

(There's nothing I can do. No matter what I try, she cuts me off ahead of time!!)

She supposedly had an endless number of cards available and could continue in any direction, but no matter what, Uniquely Selfless was one step ahead of her. Rather than lying in wait, this enemy was actively matching her movements. It was like the woman could predict the future. It felt like playing rock-paper-scissors dozens of times and losing every single time. That situation continued on and on and Renge could no longer tell if it was a mere technique or if it was a subtle trick.

And that was exactly why she made a mistake she would never have made under normal circumstances.

By the time she realized what had happened, she had already used her last White Thorn.

(Oh, no! I'm out of ammo!?)

Those white spheres were automatically replenished with time and a maximum of seven could be held at a time, so she should never have run out if she had kept a proper pace.

But her confusion had caused her to lose sight of that pace. She had been too focused on switching out her Material.

The White Thorns were replenished at about one every ten seconds.

That was only one-sixth of a minute, but in that time, she could not affect the low, middle, high, or lowest sound Petals or switch out her Material.

And the fatal result arrived a moment later.

At that time, Higan had taken the form of DEC Tentacle, the giant squid with thick chains, and the Material's chains were wrapped around the Tree Hand that resembled an arm growing from the ground like a giant tree.

The riding suit beauty then fired a White Thorn that knocked a new Petal into a Spot.

The target in the DEC Tentacle's grasp changed form under the control of Uniquely Selfless. It became a five meter sphere that seemed to be made of balled-up barbed wire as thick as a human arm.
Its name was the Giant Hostile Eye (cuw – nu – o – qux – o – ag – du).
The red pupil in the center intently stared down its target. As soon as a faint light flashed in the center of the barbed wire ball, it expanded in every direction as if it had exploded.
That strike blasted away the ten chains and sent Higan's giant body staggering backwards.
<Kyah!?>
The enemy's sound range had shifted from middle to low.
Higan contained a high sound Material, so this was a fatally poor match.
The mass of barbed wire exploded and contracted again and again. Each time, it tore away at the giant squid body of Higan's DEC Tentacle Material.
It was all over if the cracks reached Higan's soft Silhouette filling the center of the monster's translucent belly. It was accepted practice that one could not win against your Material's weakness no matter what. The proper course of action was to change the Material out for one with a different sound range, but Renge could not since she had run out of White Thorns.
It all came down to the circular relationship of the sound ranges. Unless there was a large difference in the cost levels of the two Materials, that relationship could not be overcome with brute force.
Ten seconds.
She only had to wait ten seconds.
More and more of the DEC Tentacle was torn away like wet paper or pieces of styrofoam and the scars of the damage were approaching Higan inside.
The tentacle arms made of thick chains were torn off or blown away and a nearby streetlight was broken completely in two.
Renge clenched her teeth while listening to Higan's screams directly reaching her mind.
(Has my stock of White Thorns still not replenished!? Higan is in danger!!)
Renge could only wait for that time to come, but she suddenly noticed something odd.
The riding suit beauty known as Uniquely Selfless was preparing to hit another of her White Thorns with her Blood-Sign.
(I was wrong.)
Renge gulped.
Guard of Honor already had the sound range her Material was weak to and that advantage would remain for the time being, so the woman had no reason to swap out her Material. That meant she had another reason to use that White Thorn.
(I misread what she was after!!)
Uniquely Selfless was not aiming for the low, middle, or high sounds.
She was aiming for the color white.

One of Renge's White Thorns continued to slowly ricochet off the floor and walls even after she had run out. After a White Thorn was sent out, it would disappear on its own once it stopped moving. In other words, a summoner could only affect them with the initial hit of the Blood-Sign. But that also made them defenseless when they were moving. Unless a new White Thorn hit them to alter their path, the summoner could only watch them continue on.
(Taboo 3. If a White Thorn still in the field accidentally enters a Spot while the summoner has no White Thorns in stock, the summoner will be killed. They will lose control of the Material's composition, it will be replaced by the Black Maw that Swallows All (nu – lp – eu – bf – zuh – ei – jkv – iu – a – xw) which is the worst of all the monsters, and it will devour the summoner.)
A chill filled Renge's entire body as she recalled that standard and inviolable rule.
The enemy had never even truly focused on the clash between Materials. She was planning to use the taboo of the Black Maw that Swallows All to directly kill the summoner.
(Not good! Not good!! How much longer? Five seconds? Three? Either way, I can't do anything until my stock is replenished!! And if I'm killed, Higan won't be able to use any of her power!!)
Uniquely Selfless gathered all her strength to jab with her Blood-Sign. The enemy's white sphere of light shot forward like a bullet and the riding suit woman clearly intended for it to ricochet off the warehouse wall and then hit Renge's old White Thorn into a Spot. Its course was aggravatingly accurate.
Renge had nothing to work with.
There was nothing she could do.
She had nothing in stock and if her White Thorn was knocked into the Spot now, she would be killed.
And so she did not rely on her own power.
"Higan!! Destroy the warehouse on the left! Hurry!!"
"!?"
The riding suit woman's expression changed just a bit.
A moment later, the giant squid being torn apart by the exploding barbed wire collapsed on top of the warehouse to crush it. It destroyed the metal structure as easily as stepping on a paper box.
The enemy had tried to hit Renge's White Thorn by ricocheting it off the warehouse wall.
With that wall completely gone, the White Thorn fired by Guard of Honor's summoner strayed from its intended course.
(The enemy's Material is the Giant Hostile Eye (cuw – nu – o – qux – o – ag – du). If you ignore the six lowest sound vowels, it's made up of three low sounds, two middle sounds, and two high sounds. That puts it in the low sound range and lets me use *that*.)

The small bit of time that bought gave Renge a replenished White Thorn. That single item appeared out of thin air.
She jabbed the tip of her Blood-Sign against the floating White Thorn to immediately fire it. But she had not panicked or not given this proper thought. This time, her attack was based in calm and accurate calculations. She was targeting the White Thorn the enemy had fired.
This was her revenge.
The two White Thorns collided, their paths changed, and Uniquely Selfless's one hit both a middle sound and a high sound Petal floating in the air. The two Petals were knocked into and absorbed by Spots.
That made three each of the low sounds, middle sounds, and high sounds.
"Taboo 1."
When the riding suit beauty heard Renge speak, her face froze over.
She had likely remembered what Renge went on to announce as if reading the woman's mind.
"A summoner must not gather an equal number of low, middle, and high sounds. If they do, their own Material will transform into the Black Maw that Swallows All and swallow them whole!!"
A sticky sound rang out and the barbed wire form of the enemy's Giant Hostile Eye transformed into a vortex of pitch-black slime. It rose up like a snake and the very top of the tornado was absolutely filled with fangs.
There was no scream.
Before the woman could make a single noise, the Black Maw that Swallows All attacked from above and instantly devoured the puny human.
A disturbing sound filled the air as a life was lost.
And as if to prove it, the Black Maw that Swallows All transformed yet again. The unconscious vessel woman was thrown carelessly to the utterly broken ground.
But there was no salvation for her either. Upon the summoner's death, the vessel in which the Black Maw that Swallows All resided had her mind shattered. The previous middle-aged freelance summoner could not have survived being swallowed up by the rubble either, so nothing was gained from this victory.
The piles of rubble would not be returned to normal and the lost lives would not be resurrected as if it had all been a joke.
All that remained was the simple fact that they had won and survived.
That was the world summoners lived in.
Renge then heard the muttering of Higan's heart through their linked minds.
<Oh, White Queen, please watch over the path of this lost human soul.>
"We don't have time for sentimentality. Higan, we're going to make a run for it. We can't afford to hide. We'll have to use a chain to break through!!"
In a summoner battle using an Incense Grenade, the Artificial Sacred Ground would disappear on its own when either a conclusion was reached or ten minutes had passed.

However, immediately after defeating the opposing summoner, the summoner could freely move along with the Artificial Sacred Ground for about ninety seconds. Modern summoning ceremonies were a technique to summon the gods using battles, but the “residual heat” remaining after a target was defeated could be used to borrow the enemy’s existence to run the system without it being bound to their thoughts. If a new enemy was taken in for a battle before the ninety seconds ran out, the battle would begin with the current Material intact.
That was a major advantage.
The enemy would be forced to build up their Material from the weakest level, but Renge and Higan could begin with a much more powerful Material. If that lasted long enough, they could build up a Material much more complex and advanced than could be summoned in only ten minutes.
Of course, the damage taken would carry over as well and losing the chain for even an instant meant losing it all and having to start from scratch again, but keeping it up would eventually bring the strongest levels within reach. Even the lowest of rookies would be rewarded for their effort if they kept it up.
Just as some giant fireworks were cheerfully launched on the coast opposite this harbor battlefield, the two sisters began running along the asphalt with Higan still transformed into the Material.
There was no point in hiding any longer.
“Higan, we’re going to break through!! The enemy will have to start with the first Materials, so we just have to crush them before they can build it up!!”
They defeated enemy after enemy after enemy after enemy.
While keeping the negative chain going, the two ran through the nighttime harbor.
They destroyed one enemy and then hunted down the next.
And as they did so, the Material residing within Higan continued to grow.
People lay collapsed along the route they had taken. Unlike with the Black Maw created by violating the taboos, defeating the Material via normal methods did not kill the summoner. They instead became clockwork dolls that repeated the same action over and over again due to the attack that killed the god they had summoned. The standard was to finish them off at that point, but it may have been lucky for both sides that they did not have time for that now.
Standard firearms were useless against both summoner and vessel and gathering together only allowed them to continue fighting in a chain. That was what made them so useful, but they were not almighty.
Guard of Honor responded appropriately.
<The human presences are disappearing. Renge, um, what is this?>
“They’re keeping their people away to break our chain. They’re planning to try again once the Artificial Sacred Ground disappears and you return to a normal human. But this is actually perfect for us!!”

Summoner and Material ran to their destination.
After about ninety seconds, the chain broke and the Artificial Sacred Ground vanished. Higan's body transformed from being a strange monster and back into a lovely girl, which meant their built up power had been lost.
Higan swayed to the side in her shrine maiden outfit.
"…Kh…"
"Are you okay, Higan!?"
Chaining battles together was something like a secret trick and the burden of surpassing the ten minute restriction was placed on the vessel and it grew as time went on. She was fortunate to not have passed out.
And as soon as Renge lent her sister her shoulder, they were surrounded.
There were twenty people in all which meant ten summoner/vessel pairs.
While able to control a powerful Material due to their chain was one thing, these numbers put them at an overwhelming disadvantage when they had to restart from the beginning.
Renge looked around and grimaced.
The shape and sizes of their Blood-Signs were all different, but there was one trait in common.
(They all have the name Uniquely Selfless? Dammit, that wasn't an individual's name?)
They were directly below the giant bridge connecting the reclaimed land of the harbor with the rest of the city. It was a multipurpose bridge with a road on top, a monorail track down below, and power lines and communication cables running through it. Renge did not remember what its name was.
Amid the great din coming from the bridge, a voice slipped smoothly into her ear. It belonged to one of the several Guard of Honor summoners with the name Uniquely Selfless.
"It's over."
"I wouldn't be so sure."
"Can you not see this?"
The summoner shook a small can. The object with a pin and safety lever on the top was an Incense Grenade. When it detonated, an Artificial Sacred Ground would open and the final battle would begin.
(Honestly, I can't believe you can summon a god with a can. Whoever invented those things was insane.)
With that thought about that tool they used, Renge felt sweat pouring from her body within her shrine maiden outfit.
Meanwhile, Uniquely Selfless continued.
"With everyone we cornered here, we've asked who hired them. I'll try it with you as well, but I'm honestly not expecting much since none of the answers have matched so far. It doesn't matter what. Just give me an answer and I'll kill you right away."

“Hey,” said Renge while stepping forward to protect Higan. “Sorry, but we’ve got some extra Incense Grenades. Do you mind if we start this one? It doesn’t really matter who sets up the Artificial Sacred Ground, right?”
“What, do you like exposing your belly to the man-eating beast after losing all hope yet laughing as a living mannequin?”
The summoner sounded surprised and Renge’s eyelids twitched.
However, she managed to maintain her smile.
“One, simply using the Incense Grenade is meaningless. If it is not used while looking directly at the target individual, the Artificial Sacred Ground will not appear.”
A quiet high-pitched sound reached her ears.
She had pulled the Incense Grenade’s pin while holding the safety lever in place.
“Two, no matter where the summoner and vessel are when the Incense Grenade detonates, they will be automatically moved to the center of the created Artificial Sacred Ground.”
With that said, she forcefully threw the Incense Grenade.
However, she did not throw it to her feet or into the enemy formation.
“Three, the Artificial Sacred Ground will be constructed relative to the surface the Incense Grenade is touching when it detonates. This goes beyond the floor or the ground. If the Artificial Sacred Ground is created relative to the wall or ceiling, those inside can freely run around on the wall or ceiling!!”
She threw the can directly upwards and onto the bottom of the giant multipurpose bridge covering them.
More specifically, she threw it onto a car of the unmanned freight monorail racing along the track attached to the bottom of the bridge.
After a bursting sound, the Meinokawa sisters were thrown forcefully into the air as if invisible wires were connected to their bodies. The shock was enough to knock the breath out of them and cause an unpleasant sound in their necks, but it successfully brought them from the harbor and all the enemies there. They slammed into the bottom surface of the freight monorail that was racing along at nearly eighty kilometers-per-hour. The car had a super-deformed image of a lion painted on it as part of an advertisement and Renge had a feeling the thing’s face had dented a little.
“Gah!!”
“Kh… Higan, are you okay? At any rate, we need to get up. This Artificial Sacred Ground won’t last longer than ten minutes. Do you have anything to tie yourself on with? If you don’t, you’ll fall off as soon as the effects wear off.”
The twin sisters stood upside down on the bottom of the monorail like bats. The harbor that had been such a place of terror was growing smaller by the moment.
Incidentally, just one of the summoners surrounding them would have been dragged along with them as the Artificial Sacred Ground moved with the

monorail, but that was no different from being hit by a giant wall moving at eighty kilometers-per-hour. The summoner would not have had time to summon a Material, so their supernatural protective circle would not have functioned. They had most likely been turned to mincemeat.
At any rate, the sisters were finally safe.
Or so they thought.
A moment later, the giant bridge that was also used as a landmark broke completely in half.
For an instant, the two girls did not understand what had happened.
Their vision shook like crazy, but they still spotted a cruiser in the dark ocean directly below. A woman in a pink nurse uniform stood on its deck and she rested a long rod – a Blood-Sign – on her shoulder.
(A summoner!? She interfered!?)
At the same time, what had destroyed the bridge came into view. A small short-haired girl could be seen on the cruiser's deck next to the summoner. She wore a dancer's outfit that's purple cloth just barely covered the important parts of her body. Her exposed skin felt more sickly than seductive, but that may have been because she was sitting in a worn-out and rusty wheelchair. Her head was tilted and nothing resembling a will could be seen in the green eyes half-covered by her bangs. She then made a slight movement of her terribly skinny index finger.
That was all she did, but it was enough to slice apart the several hundred ton bridge.
A massive amount of seawater burst up like a giant wall and a space of several hundred meters was forcibly sliced through. The laser beam gathered any and all objects inside itself, compressed them like a black hole, and tore apart their bonds.
"That's beyond Divine-class."
The modern summoning ceremony using the Blood-Sign was a thoroughly simplified technique to summon and use a high-quality version of the fickle gods of legend.
Before, decades were spent carving away stone to build a temple, the movement of the stars was observed to calculate out the perfect timing, and living humans were even prepared as sacrifices, but even then it was up to the god whether they would show up or not. However, those days were over. With the vessel, the Incense Grenade, and the Blood-Sign, it was possible to invite in what was not human with perfect reliability.
The Regulation-class such as the DEC Tentacle that Renge and Higan had used or the Giant Hostile Eye were nothing more than manmade frameworks put together as stepping stones to reach the Divine class. Those true monsters could not be harmed with thermobaric warheads or laser bombardments and they could of course be used in battle, but that was merely a side-effect of being tools to reach the gods.
However, humanity had come to learn something else.

There was something beyond the Divine-class which they had assumed was the final destination of the world's laws.
There was a territory hidden beyond that and a term had been coined for the secret residents who sat stagnant in that territory.
"The Unexplored-class."
The Spirit of the Fluttering "Yellow" Gills that Rules the Heavens (s – a – so – voz – tix – ei – yw – za).
The "White" Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz)
And the one wielding its power against them now.
"The Lady of 'Purple Lightning' that Separates Good from Evil (iu – ao – eu – ei – kub – miq – a – ci – pl)!?"
As soon as Higan uttered the name, the freight monorails cars lost their connections and fell down into the ocean. The mascots painted on them continued to smile as they crashed into the cold ocean and began to sink.
There was nothing Renge or Higan could do but fall along with the rubble.
They had failed.
That same thought entered Renge's mind once more.
Even so, she desperately reached a hand out toward her sister who had been flung out into empty space.
"Higan!!"
But her wish was not granted.
She could not reach her sister and she was slammed into the surface of the dark, cold ocean.

——What had she been thinking then?
"Gah!?"
Unlike her sister Renge, Meinokawa Higan did not fall into the ocean.
Inertia flung her body over the waterway and to the opposite bank.
A number of boats were moored along the bank and she seemed to have landed on one of those. She had trouble breathing and her mind blinked in and out of consciousness, but she thought to herself while unable to get up.
——What had she hoped for then?
(…ge…)
She could not form words or even cough. Her mind was on the verge of tearing apart, but she focused and gained some strength even if it was only in her mind.
As if representing the exact opposite of her mental state, great colorful rings of fireworks burst in the night sky. Their brightness and peacefulness seemed to coldly reject everything about Higan.
(Ren…ge…)
The enemy summoner had to have set up an Artificial Sacred Ground to summon the Lady of Purple Lightning from the Unexplored-class, but it had not captured the twin sisters.

However, Higan did not view that as good luck. That would not have happened without good reason.
The enemy had started by separating the summoner and vessel.
Renge's fall into the ocean was dangerous. Artificial Sacred Grounds worked relative to one's footing, so they did not work well in deep water.
And neither of the girls could summon a Material alone. Pursuit would soon arrive to defeat them individually while they were defenseless. The man crushed by the rubble had given his own life to tell them the enemy was an organization named Guard of Honor and the enemy summoners would not allow anyone to leave with that information.
A small scraping sound proved her bad feeling true.
Guard of Honor had already surrounded the group of boats on the water.
That meant Higan had been intentionally thrown right into their net.
How was just a summoner or just a vessel supposed to stand up to a Material that could not be harmed by bullets or explosives?
But despite the hopeless situation, the first thing on Higan's mind was not her own predicament. Something more important filled her mind.
An enemy unit had been lying in wait for Higan, so what about her sister Renge? Had a group of frogmen been waiting in the ocean? Or would the Lady of Purple Lightning target her directly from the cruiser? Either way, her odds of victory were almost nonexistent. She would be unable to even set up a proper battle.
(O-oh, White Queen who…guides us to victory…in extraordinary…battles…)
She mouthed the good-luck charm she had repeated again and again since she was young. It had partially been a type of rote learning meant to familiarize her heart with the Materials which were literally not of this world, but she had also innocently believed it. She believed that if she called out and focused her heart enough, it would create some kind of connection.
(Please reach…this fragile…human soul.)
But no help was coming.
It simply could not happen.
Summoning ceremonies were a strict technique. The most useful parts of every ceremony around the world had had been re-unified to create them and they would make the gods (or that which lay beyond them) work for humans with 100% reliability. But when relying on a traditional appeal to a god, the odds of help were something known only by the gods.
And as her vision went dark, Meinokawa Higan lost sight of what she was praying to.
She just vaguely spoke the words.
"Help…"
She would lose her sister at this rate.
(Someone.)
She would lose the sister who shared her blood.
(Anyone. Just save my sister…)
She would literally be devoured.

“Help…”
No response was coming.
No help was coming.
And yet…
An instant later, she heard a series of loud metallic sounds.
Something fell to the boat’s deck. It was a man in a suit dark enough to blend into the night. As he lay sprawled out with both his strength and consciousness gone, he looked more like an abandoned doll than a human.
She was surprised to find Guard of Honor had already made it that close, but the real shock was that the enemy summoner had been defeated.
Who had done it?
What had done it?
She desperately worked her mind that was still fading in and out, but she could not find an answer. However, as she tried to focus her blurry vision, she heard a certain sound.
It was the whoosh of something lighter than a bat tearing sharply through the air. She had heard the sound countless times before. It came from a Blood-Sign, the long rod that summoners used to hit the White Thorns. However, this was not the sound of someone jabbing with the tip. They were instead casually and lazily spinning it around.
(A Blood…Sign?)
Meinokawa Higan desperately tried to raise her head.
(But there’s…no Material here. There’s no summoning…ceremony. Then… did they use it to stab like a spear…and hit the man directly?)
But just as she forced herself, her vision filled with black and she could no longer tell who was there.
“Dammit. I never thought I’d hear that cursed word here.”
And so she simply listened to the boy’s words before relinquishing her consciousness.
“This’ll make a bit of a detour. The apple sherbet won’t melt, will it?”

Facts

- When an Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground is created. The summoning and all other supernatural phenomena can only occur within that space.

- A summoner summons by carving out the “name” of the Material and having it possess their vessel.
- Only the Blood-Sign can affect the White Thorns. The White Thorns, Petals, and Spots will pass through humans and Materials. The White Thorns disappear on their own once they stop. Three are supplied at the beginning and a maximum of seven can be held. One is replenished from thin air about every ten seconds.
- The cost of the Material is determined by the number of Petals placed inside Spots and its sound range is determined by the number of small, middle, and high sounds included. The lowest sounds do not influence the sound range.
- The Material contains the Silhouette which stores the vessel’s mind. If it is destroyed, the battle comes to an end.
- During battle, the summoner enters a protective circle created with their Material’s power. The summoner is essentially invincible during the battle.
- Taboo 1: An equal number of low, middle, and high sound Petals must not be placed in Spots and added to the Material’s stock.
- Taboo 3: When a summoner has no stock of White Thorns, a White Thorn remaining in the field must not enter a Spot.
- The White Thorns, Petals, and Spots are not affected by gravity. However, they are affected by their own sort of friction from the air.
- An Incense Grenade will have no effect unless it is used while viewing the target with the naked eye. Also, an Artificial Sacred Ground can be placed on walls and ceilings. Once the Incense Grenade detonates, the summoner and vessel are pulled toward the center of the Artificial Sacred Ground.
- An Artificial Sacred Ground has a fixed location, but it will move along with the summoner for ninety seconds after their enemy has been defeated. If contact is made with the next enemy in that time, a chain of battles can be achieved while continuing to use the same Material. However, this increases the vessel’s fatigue.
- Materials are divided into three classes: Regulation, Divine, and Unexplored. The upper two classes cannot be summoned through normal means.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ A reference to the Japanese children’s song Fushigi na Pocket. Dino Lingo "Magical Pocket"

Stage 01: I Don’t Do That Anymore

「お姉ちゃんを、たすけて、くれるの?」

「やなこった、だね」

(Stage 01 Open 04/14 23:10)

ステージ01

そういうの卒業しました

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Will you help my sister?”
“No, I don’t think so.”
(Stage 01 Open 04/14 23:10)
I Don’t Do That Anymore

Part 1

“So anyway, we were talking about how you weren’t attracted to your little sister here because I wasn’t wearing a white school swimsuit, right?”
“No, we were not! We were just listening to something pretty important! Life or death levels of important!!”
“A fluorescent bikini just isn’t pure enough for you, is it? I understand. I was wrong and prideful to think you would just dig right in as long as it had stripes. I’ve learned my lesson.”
“So you’re just going to keep on with your insane logic? Doesn’t it seem wrong that reasonable people have a harder time living in this world? Hey? Are you listening!? How about you look me in the eye and either nod or shake your head!?”
Their location had changed.
That said, they were still inside the same apartment. Aika’s residence used both the top floor and the one below it with staircases and an atrium connecting them, so it had plenty of rooms and plenty of space.
The shrine maiden lying in the hallway had turned out to be alive.
They had just finished hearing what she had to say after she had finally woken up.
There were two reasons they had changed their location.
The first was the white liger that Aika used as a sofa. The shrine maiden was injured, so they had needed to move to another room lest the scent of blood carelessly worked up the animal’s bloodlust (not simple animalistic lust).
And the second…
“Guard of Honor… We’ve heard that name recently too.”
“ ‘We’? Do you mean Government, Aika?”
“Onii-chan, Government is the great ally of justice funded by sixty governments, religions, and giant corporations. Basically, it’s an occult version of a UN army. Of course we keep an eye on any dangerous groups.”
Swimsuit-wearing Aika waved her index finger around.

“Guard of Honor is a new organization gathering a bunch of strength in Illegal, that collection of 330 criminal groups which forms another of the three major powers.”
“Illegal… I had a feeling.”
Kyousuke looked over to the room’s door. Lu Niang Lan in her modified China dress was not here. She was hanging out with the white liger in the living room. She had complained about having to listen to any troubles involving Government, but that was because she was an equipment supplier for Illegal.
Incidentally, both Shiroyama Kyousuke and the blonde shrine maiden belonged to Freedom, a group of individual summoners with no hierarchy restricting them. The summoning industry was basically a three-way struggle between those groups.
“Come to think of it, beauty and the beast are alone together in there. Will she be fine without the owner? It would be a disaster if she were attacked.”
“Heh heh heh. The liger loves marbled beef with plenty of fat, so it would be great if it tore those lumps of fat right off her.”
“That would not be great. And if it came to a scuffle between those two, I’d be more worried about the white liger’s safety.”
So the only ones here were Shiroyama Kyousuke, Aika, and the bandaged shrine maiden girl. Her name seemed to be Meinokawa Higan.
She had long blonde hair and blue eyes. That was far removed from the standard image of a shrine maiden, but it gave her a pure and graceful image that was oddly appropriate for the Japanese holy outfit. The fact that it looked so perfect on her may have been proof that she had worn the outfit for many years.
Her story could be summed up as follows:
She had been attacked by a monster and had gotten separated from her twin sister. That sister was being pursued by the people controlling the monster, so she would be in danger if not found and protected soon.
“What do you think, Onii-chan?”
“It’s a mystery what that Guard of Honor organization was doing at the harbor, but they must not want anyone to know they were there. I would assume they’ll chase down and slaughter anyone who escaped.”
Higan had managed to reach a Government stronghold, but Renge would be the perfect target while wandering around outside. She had no organization to shield her and she could not use a summoning ceremony when separated from her vessel.
She would be killed the instant she was found. It was best to assume that worst case scenario.
Meinokawa Higan hesitantly opened her mouth.
“U-um, this is a…contact point for Government, right? That summoner told me this place is *expensive* but that I wouldn’t be abandoned…”

“You sign up for insurance in advance so you can use it when you need it. It sounds like your mistake was getting the funds you needed taken by a cheap and greedy middleman.”
Swimsuit girl Aika put her hands on her hips and snorted as she said that, so Shiroyama Kyousuke interrupted from the side.
“Hold on there. This happened because Government agitated some Freedom summoners into clashing with a new faction inside Illegal, so of course you and Government have to take responsibility here. Eh? Or are you only pure allies of justice because you refuse to admit to your mistakes?”
“Hmph. Government isn’t just a giant monolith. There are several factions inside it.”
“…There you have it. And you’re the one that acts like it’s one giant organization, too.”
“Onii-chan, are you the kind of brother who pokes at his little sister’s weak points until she cries? If I went around cleaning up after all the fools in Government, I’d never do anything else. I’m not interested in supporting some defeated soldiers. Besides, I already know you’ll take care of it.”
“What the hell was the comment you just slipped in there!?”
“Tah dah!! Shiroyama Kyousuke here is Freedom Award 902, the skilled summoner known as Alice (with) Rabbit! He’s also been called the Ace Destroyer, the Unexplored-Class Summoner, Loved by the White, Eternal Wearer of Material, the Hive Crusher, and many more. …In fact, it’s rude of you not to have notice the second you saw him, you rookie. If you twin sisters are from Freedom, then he’s your superior.”
“Stop it! Why are you making a sales pitch about me? Well, Aika!? Explain it to me in your own words!!”
He shook her by the shoulders when she simply smiled and averted her gaze, but not even that stopped the swimsuit girl’s sales pitch.
Meanwhile, naïve Meinokawa Higan’s eyes were sparkling with a pure light.
“A-Award 902…”
It was hardly surprising that her voice had grown a little shrill.
Government, Illegal, and Freedom had all made a contract with one of the three great Materials standing at the peak of either the low, middle, or high sounds. The summoners belonging to the group would be given awards by residents of *the other side* based on the outcomes of their actions. These awards were directly carved into their souls.
Generally, the more awards a summoner had won, the greater their skill.
Also, summoners believed in a certain legend: Award 1000.
When a summoner of the three groups reached that number, it was said the world they lived in would be reversed. This world and the other world would be swapped out and they would become a lifeform of *the other side*. Instead of summoning the gods, they would stand alongside the gods in the world of the gods and they would become the star of a new legend comparable to those of the other gods.
Award 902 was well within reach of that legend.

“You’re in the 900s!? S-someone that amazing will really help me save my sister? And for free!?”
“Did she just mix her own hopes in there!? Who ever said anything about for free!?”
“Oh…but I don’t have any of our money. My sister always carried the wallet, you see. So you’ll have to wait until we find my sister to be paid, and since she doesn’t know about any of this, you’ll have to renegotiate everything with her, and no one can beat her in an argument, and based on how you look, it just seemed to me that it would end up being for free.”
“That’s it. I’m going home and climbing in bed.”
“Wait, wait, wait! I-I apologize for telling the truth, so, u-um, wait just a little more!!”
“What, what? What is with you!? Do you like stabbing people with your words with that pure look in your eyes? It certainly looks like it!”
“You mustn’t let this shock you, Onii-chan. That’s the true form of the purity (heh) you’re always looking for. Besides, how is someone with no self-interest supposed to grasp the subtleties of others’ hearts?”
“Wh-whatever you might say, my sister really is in danger! B-b-back then… she might have been attacked by the Unexplored-class Lady of Purple Lightning.”
“If it’s a human up against a Material, won’t they be killed in an instant even against the weakest of them, not to mention an Unexplored-class?”
“She’s definitely still alive!!”
Meinokawa Higan nearly shouted to make that alone clear.
When the blonde shrine maiden continued, she seemed to be counting on her fingers.
“I don’t know where my sister is now, but sh-she can’t summon a Material without me as her vessel. There’s nothing she can do if Guard of Honor finds her. You know that a human can’t hope to fight back against even the weakest Material, don’t you!?”
“When I say I don’t care, I really mean it, but what do you think, Onii-chan?”
“I’d say she’ll last three days at the absolute most and she can’t leave the city.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke calmly and digitally calculated out the answer.
The swimsuit girl agreed with him.
“Things would be different if we had some proof that the Meinokawa sisters attacked Guard of Honor on Government’s request, but this was a greedy middleman who used the summoners of another group as sacrificial pawns. I’m sure they’ve covered their tracks and will feign ignorance.”
No one wanted to rush out and fight an unnecessary battle.
Aika viewed Government as a giant army. They were not a group of guerrillas or terrorists that was willing to destroy their own. That giant organization of winners would prioritize a reduction in their own losses over achieving their objective.

Even if they defeated one hundred thousand enemies, it would be recorded as a horrific defeat if a thousand of their own were lost in the process. They were so used to winning that their very way of thinking had been rewritten like that.
“B-but…” Meinokawa Higan paled. “Guard of Honor is far more powerful than we had heard and now we can’t even rely on that giant organization’s strength? Th-then who is going to save my sister? (Glance, glance)”
“Aika. There’s nothing pure about her at all!! She’s clearly trying to send me to my death for her own ends!!”
“The truly pure are those who don’t try to hide their desires, Onii-chan. Or maybe it’s the ones where you can’t tell whether they are or not. Hee hee hee.”
Holding back tears yet? Let’s go back over the situation.
The Meinokawa sisters were being pursued by Guard of Honor.
Renge was a summoner, but she could not use summoning ceremonies while separated from Higan, her vessel.
At this rate, Renge would be captured and killed by Guard of Honor before long.
The (self-styled) allies of justice of Government were not going to be much help and both Illegal and Freedom had no obligation to help in the first place.
The Meinokawa sisters belonged to Freedom, but Freedom was a group of five hundred “individual” summoners. They couldn’t ask for help from a colleague unless they knew each other personally.
However, Shiroyama Kyousuke was a summoner and Meinokawa Higan was a vessel.
Kyousuke was skilled enough to hold Freedom Award 902 and he had accomplished the Hive Crusher feat in which he destroyed an entire organization on his own.
The two of them were incomplete parts of a pair, so if they joined forces, there was still a chance of success.
“B-back then…” Meinokawa Higan spoke quietly while embracing her own bandaged shoulders. “Even when we were surrounded by Guard of Honor’s Materials, m-my sister tried to let me escape first and foremost. She never put it to words, but I could tell. She had to have had a few ways of *letting herself alone escape to safety*, but she let me escape instead.”
Kyousuke did not know Meinokawa Renge.
She was apparently a fellow Freedom member, but there was no information on those twin sisters in the prominent Awards. They also didn’t seem to have one of the nicknames that others began using to refer to people.
But the other sister, Higan, was here now.
That fact said something about the summoner named Meinokawa Renge.
“So this time I’ll save her. I want to save her! A vessel can’t summon Material on her own, but that changes when there’s also a summoner not

bound by a contract. If you work with me, we actually have a way of reaching my sister where she's suffering!!"
Kyousuke found himself wondering if he could do that.
Not in reference to his number of Awards on paper. And not in reference to his skill.
Was he the kind of summoner who could choose to protect his family by passing the ultimate decision to someone else in a hopeless situation with no right answer?
"Please," said Higan through her trembling lips.
This was her final hope, a tiny light, a far-too-thin thread. It looked like a careless touch would cause it to snap, but she could not help but reach her hand out toward it using her voice.
"Please!! Work with me to help my sister!!"
Shiroyama Kyousuke sighed when he heard that one word in particular.
Swimsuit girl Aika shrugged next to him.
There was a reason he was known as Alice (with) Rabbit.
That boy had decided this would be his final job.
So what was the best choice here? What would he reach for with everything lined up in front of him?
What could he do with a girl crying in front of him after losing everything?
After giving it plenty of thought, he spoke.
"No, I don't think so."

Part 2

Shiroyama Kyousuke walked through the streets alone after leaving Aika's luxury apartment.
It was already past midnight, but this was the giant amusement park known as Toy Dream 35. Simply put, the concepts of "good morning" and "good night" did not exist here. Bright lights flashed on Ferris wheels and roller coaster tracks, projectors displayed countless images on building walls, fireworks were launched from the boats anchored out at sea, and laser art colored the night sky along with those fireworks.
"This is Sergeant Howard's AR Survival Game! Don't you want to take part in a shootout in a thermal power plant!? 100 toy chips to play. The line starts here!!"
"If you want to have some fun at the Royal Casino, follow the red rabbit's instructions. Only 300 toy chips a game."
"Gozaru, gozaru. I am the Gozaru Samurai!"

Everything from bunny girls suggestively showing off their bodylines to strange costumed characters were walking back and forth. It was impossible to tell who was a worker and who was a tourist.
However, Kyousuke's location was odd.
It was something like a giant land bridge connecting two high-rise buildings. The structures were sometimes seen near train stations, but they seemed to fill every nook and cranny of this city.
Directly below was the dark seawater decorated by neon and laser art. There was no concept of "ground" here. The intelligently designed buildings stuck directly out of the ocean. The first and second floors were all covered in glass, creating a half-natural aquarium. Pirate ships and Japanese-style yakatabune moved freely through the giant canals that existed in place of roads.
Directly above were several more similar bridges. In this theme park city, you could look up and see the fireworks from almost anywhere.
While Shiroyama Kyousuke thought about that, he heard a jangling noise. He turned around and saw a girl ringing a hand bell in a miniskirt Santa outfit even thought it was an April night.
"Jan, jan, jan! Congratulations on being the two millionth person to cross this bridge. Now, now, now. As a small prize, you will receive-… Oh, it's Shiroyama-kun."
"Huh? Is that you, Librarian-chan? A Santa girl in the early spring? Going on the attack, are we?"
"I'm your classmate, so try to remember my name. Oh, and this is a joint campaign with 'The Santa Girl who Couldn't Get Home'. It's playing now, so head on over to the nearest movie theater. You can still make the late show."
"…I didn't want to know that."
"Oh, and please don't let the school know about this. I don't want them to know I'm working part-time."
Before even getting to the school rules, Japan's laws forbade minors from working late at night, but this was Toy Dream 35. The division wasn't as clear as a fenced-off foreign military base, but the rules were still different here.
Kyousuke accepted a box wrapped like something from a Christmas sales war, waved toward the student librarian who clasped her hands in front of her face in a "Please!" pose, and began walking once more.
But he soon came to another stop.
He turned around to find Meinokawa Higan standing there on the verge of tears in her shrine maiden outfit. She had her hands on her elbows and was gasping for breath.
"Pant, pant… W-wait. Please wait!"
"Do you need something?"

“I…I told you my sister’s in trouble, didn’t I? I’m a vessel and, um, you’re a summoner. If we update our contracts, we can work together and go help my sister. So…!!”

“But.” Kyousuke leaned against the giant bridge’s railing. “That’s what *you* want. I have no reason to risk my life here. Or are you saying you have a reason for me?”
“I-I’m, um…!!”
Higan shouted within the crowd while grabbing the center of her shrine maiden outfit’s vermilion skirt.
“I’m wearing striped panties!!!!!!”
A mysterious sound effect followed her announcement.
A pirate ship in the canal below seemed to have fired a blank from its cannon.
Shiroyama Kyousuke did not understand in the slightest, so he asked an honest question.
“U-um… Do shrine maidens even wear underwear? Part-time ones aside, I thought the legit ones traditionally didn’t wear any.”
“Oh, um, going without is the standard, but today is special. I happened to overhear someone saying, ‘Onii-chan is a genius who will accept anything if it’s got stripes’. A-and that apartment just so happened to have a clothes dresser labelled ‘Ultimate Weapon’ that was full of striped things!!”
“……I’m not even sure where to begin on this one.”
Should he begin with the fact that she actually believed he would be willing to die if she showed him a striped pattern? Or maybe with the fact that she had stolen that striped object from someone else’s home?
In fact, he could even start with the fundamental fact that she was willing to put someone else’s panties on her bare skin like that.
He had heard on a variety show that the generally obedient and quiet girls would do the most unbelievable things when they felt cornered and finally exploded, and that was proving surprisingly accurate.
But despite straying from the proper path, Higan did seem to still have a shame meter (even if it was broken).
“K-khhh! You don’t believe me, do you? B-but I really am wearing them! I guess we can’t move on until I prove it to you. F-fine then. If it’s to save my sister, I-I-I-I-I-I-ow! I bit my tongue… I’m prepared to lift up this skirt right here! H-hnnn!!”
“Wait, wait, wait, wait just a damn second!! That’s where I need to start!!”
“Oh, White Queen who holds the greatest power of the Unexplored-class, give me the courage to bear the embarrassment needed to save my sister!!”
“If you have enough sense to find it embarrassing, then stop!! What do you think you’re doing out in public!? Hm? In fact, is a shrine maiden skirt really made to lift up like a normal one?”
“U-um, there’s a lot of varieties depending on the school and style used, so some are more like normal skirts and some are more like pants. I use what’s known as a lantern design, so it won’t be a problem.”
“That’s beside the point!! I’m trying to say that a young girl lifting her skirt in public is more than enough of a problem in and of itself! Honestly!!”

“Y-you mean you want to do it in a closed room? Tremble tremble.”
“Why are you looking at me like a terrified animal? You’re the one that started this and I’m the one trying to stop you.”
“B-but…”
Higan tilted her head with her skirt pulled at the borderline level that could be titled, “Young Lady with a Long Skirt Playing in the Water”.
“Being in public or a closed room, um, makes no difference for us.”
“Well, that is true.”
As soon as Kyousuke replied, a hand bell rang behind him and the miniskirt Santa librarian spoke up.
“Congratulations on being the two millionth person! …Huh? Where did the prize go? Well, I have a spare, so it doesn’t matter.”
She was not just forgetful. That was the correct reaction.
“Anyway, you’re the two millionth person!! Oh, and this is a joint campaign with ‘The Santa Girl who Couldn’t Get Home’.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke tossed his “small prize” into the air and caught one-handed.
Whether summoner or vessel, anyone with a close connection to Materials would begin to have their presence fade after earning an Award of around 100. Or rather, they were removed from people’s minds. People could see them, but they would forget about them as soon as they left their field of vision. There was a simple reason that summoning ceremonies had not spread throughout the entire world and it wasn’t because some dark organization was suppressing the information. The human mind simply was not strong enough to directly accept the evidence of something so vast.
It affected their friends, their lovers, and their families.
It did not matter how well they knew someone.
“But even if you know they’ll forget about you a moment later, it wouldn’t feel right. I’m certainly not going to run around out here in the nude. That’s completely abandoning your humanity.”
“I-I thought your reaction was a little light… So even in a quick hypothetical, you want me to go that far!? Ah, ah…hyaaaahhh!? Y-you pervert!! Ah, ah, ah!!”
“Bhah!? B-before you squeeze your eyes shut and kick at me with your skirt still lifted, how about you work at figuring out that I gave that as an example of what *isn’t* acceptable!?”
Kyousuke’s throat was starting to hurt after all this yelling.
He himself never did anything too odd, but he was tragically surrounded by strange and eccentric people. He felt like a calm and mature actor taking a pie to the face on the stage of some intense comedy.
“I-I have to, um, save my sister no matter what!”
“Y-you already told me that. But- gwah.”
“I need your help to do that. I-I can’t stop here. We know that the world of summoners is harsh, but, um, w-we still decided to do our best there!”
“Hm?”

Kyousuke frowned at that.
Something had seemed different in that one.
“I understand that you would want to save your sister, but are you still thinking of staying in this world after all this? You must have experienced even more awful things than I know about. I thought you’d wash your hands of this after saving your sister.”
“But…this is all we have.”
She did not seem to know what to do with the skirt she had gotten carried away and lifted. It wavered at the borderline and she looked away from him a little.
“Our shrine was taken away. Th-the debt just kept piling up and minors like us had no way of paying it back. At this rate, not only won’t we be able to get our home back, but our parents will be kicked out of the rehab facility.”
“…”
Kyousuke had noticed few ominous terms in that.
He knew asking more questions would lead to nothing good, but his tongue slipped.
“Can I ask how this all started?”
“Our parents’ gambling addiction.”
An especially cold night wind blew between the two of them.
All kinds of entertainment had been developed across national borders in the international revived cities that were popping up around the world. Casinos were quite common even in Toy Dream 35. That was just the age they lived in.
“Y-you’re a summoner too, so, um, surely you know that vessels never have happy backstories. Originally, only I was supposed to be used up to pay off the debt, but my sister punched the man who was buying me and made the contract with me instead. …That’s the kind of person she is. She’s always the first one to put herself in danger, but, um, sh-she doesn’t understand how fragile and delicate she is.”
Kyousuke thought a bit about that girl who was not here.
He had assumed that the fact that her twin sister, Meinokawa Higan, was alive summed up Renge’s value.
That had been both accurate and inaccurate.
Higan’s presence here was testament to more than just the events of this night. It was also testament to the fact that she had overcome a much longer and crueler path.
“I think it’s thanks to my sister that I can still, um, see the word ‘family’ as a warm thing. Without her, I would probably just view the word with a dark smile.”
It went beyond just her life. Her sister had also saved that gentler part of her.
“*That’s* why I want to save her.”
Her eyes looked like glasswork as they viewed what may have been reality and may have been her memories.

“I don’t want to just be saved. Sh-she needs help just as much as I do, so I’ll do anything. P-p-panties are nothing. I don’t even care if you tell me to rush back into that hell brought by Guard of Honor. I don’t want to lose my sister… I don’t want to lose my one and only sister!!”
She was probably telling the truth.
In his few interactions with her, he could tell she wasn’t skilled enough to keep a lie going this long.
If Meinokawa Higan was presented with the one and only way of saving her sister, she would likely jump at the chance, even if it meant losing her own life.
That may have been a beautiful thing.
But that was exactly why he had to say this.
“Then go die in vain. Just don’t drag anyone else down with you.”
Her expression clearly changed.
She looked a stake had been driven into her heart as he said even more.
“The summoning ceremony doesn’t work without both the summoner and the vessel. You’re so desperate to save your sister that you can’t think about this rationally. …Working with you would be useless. Not only will you lose your sister, you’ll lose the life she threw away her own life to protect.”
“Wh-what are you saying…?”
“I’m telling you to cool your head. You won’t gain anything by starting a fight you can’t win. Guard of Honor is supposed to be a powerful new organization with plenty of summoners skilled enough to summon the Divine-class. Do you have any concrete vision of a way to win? I may be Freedom Award 902 Alice (with) Rabbit Shiroyama Kyousuke, but I’m not someone who appears after you rub a magic lamp. This world isn’t so simple a place that *things will just work themselves out once you speak your wish*.”
“Oh, come on! Um, I-I know I’m not being rational here! B-but, um, I can’t help it. My family is in danger. If you really think I can cool my head and be rational here, then, um, you must be a cold-hearted demon or something!!”
She spoke strongly as if everything building up inside her was exploding out.
But Kyousuke gave a simple response to the shrill cry made a step in front of him.
“But you can’t win if you don’t.”
“…!!”
He sounded so definitive that Higan fell silent.
And…
“If you can’t win, nothing you do can save your sister. Will one of you die or will both of you die? And if you include me, that’s three of us dying. If those are the only options available to you, I only have one piece of advice for you: do not head to that cruel battlefield.”
That was all he had to say.
He turned his back on her but then looked back as if he had just remembered something.

“If you are aware you don’t have the power to fight, then you should head right back to Aika’s apartment. I know you’ve been focused on your sister, but Guard of Honor will be after both the sisters who escaped. That girl likes to complain, but she won’t abandon someone who showed up seeking shelter. Living with a wild animal might seem tough, but you can safely hide there for the time being.”
“…”
“My final job is already complete. I saved your life.”
With that said, he walked into the crowd.
He had nothing more to say. He had already finished this discussion back in the apartment.
“That isn’t…”
A frail girl’s voice reached his back from the distance.
“That isn’t what I meant when I asked for ‘help’!!”
He of course knew that.

Part 3

Shiroyama Kyousuke’s “temporary home” was far less impressive than Aika’s luxury apartment, but it still may have been unusual for a normal high school boy.
It was not a house, an apartment, a dorm room, an inn, a hotel, a tent, or even a cardboard box shanty.
Then what was it?
It was one of the cruisers packed in on either side of the large canals. While it was a small boat, the cabin was larger than a student apartment and it even had a bedroom with a double bed, a simple kitchen, a bath, and a bathroom. It was not a bad place to live if one ignored how frightening stormy nights were and how annoying all the seagull droppings were.
Some people saved money by buying run-down boats without an engine, but Kyousuke’s was still able to cruise.
“Sigh…”
He stepped into the bedroom without turning on the lights, moved his smartphone from his pocket to the bedside table, and then hopped into the large bed.
When he shut his eyes, his mind turned to the nickname he had spoken a few times this night: Alice (with) Rabbit.
With a few exceptions, people did not give themselves their nickname. In Kyousuke’s case, it was even a humiliating name. Even so, he had used it. In

order to get across the necessary information, he had chosen not to beat around the bush, but he started to wonder why he had gone that far.
He quickly found the answer.
“When you get down to it, do I just not want that girl to die?”
Nevertheless, the fact remained that there was nothing he could do. Pairing up with Meinokawa Higan would not be enough, but *this remained true even when ignoring that*. However, explaining that would have gotten him nowhere. If he could not do it, he could not do it. She only needed to understand that.
He looked over to the bedside table.
There was a picture frame there, but whose picture was inside it? He thought for a bit in the darkness and finally remembered.
Olivia Highland. That twelve-year-old girl with bright blonde hair had lent her body to him as a vessel to pay the investigation fee needed to search for the mother she had never known. They had worked together for a total of three weeks, but she was gone now. She had safely returned to the sunlit world.
Shiroyama Kyousuke would never let a vessel of his die.
What was the last thing she had said to him?
He remembered and then regretted it.
That was when his smartphone received a call. A gentle vibration sounded and the flashing backlight dimly illuminated the smile in the picture frame.
He grabbed the phone from the bed and saw it was from Aika.
“Onii-chan, are you having a passionate night?”
“What’s this? Do people pick random fights over the phone these days?”
“Hm. If your cruiser had become love nest, I was prepared to graduate from my shut-in ways and make a late-night attack with the liger, but if not, this probably isn’t good.”
Sensing something was wrong, he got up from the bed.
“Keep it short.”
“Meinokawa Higan hasn’t returned.”
“…”
A tingling feeling crawled along his spine.
That was the sensation of death.
“There are three possibilities: One, she was spending the night at your cruiser. Two, Guard of Honor found and captured her while she was wandering around outside. And three…”
“She got fed up with it all and went to search for her sister alone? Goddammit!!”
He cursed without meaning to.
As the middleman, Aika calmly spoke over the phone.
“You were thinking the rookie vessel named Meinokawa Higan could avoid any further danger if the summoner didn’t cooperate, but it looks like your plan failed.”

“Yeah. It would’ve taken three days at the most. If I could have tracked down the Government middleman who gave the Meinokawa sisters that job and found proof that they had been deceived, then responsibility would have fallen to that giant organization. After that, all of Government’s strength would have driven Guard of Honor from the harbor region and carefully searched for Meinokawa Renge. …That might have solved everything without that powerless girl having to face those dangerous Materials!!”
If a summoner and vessel joined forces, they could fight. That was simple enough, but there was still a problem there.
If a vessel already had a contract, they could still overwrite their contract to make a new one with a third party, but that only meant it was possible. The details of the system were not fully known. No one could say how much of a burden it would place on her.
“Onii-chan, I have something to tell you about Government.”
He had a bad feeling about this, but Aika’s voice reached his ears regardless.
“Government has no choice but to officially register Meinokawa Higan as an enemy. You know why, don’t you?”
“…Yes.”
“Government is the ally of justice funded by about sixty governments, religions, and multinational corporations. And our primary purpose is to appropriately manage the invisible asset that is the summoning ceremony. …She was only a part of Freedom before, but now that she has asked for Government’s protection, she is under our management. Running away for her personal convenience was a huge mistake. Anyone could misuse this ‘wandering asset’, so we need to freeze the account immediately. Even if it means ripping up the bankbook.”
Depositing money in a bank was a good thing. It helped increase the assets of good people and it was useful for monitoring and weakening the assets of bad people. But what if there was a large sum of money of unknown ownership that anyone could withdraw? Government would either manage it under their own trusted name or they would dispose of it.
(This is awful…)
Meinokawa Higan was already out of her league against Guard of Honor, but now Government was pursuing her too. It was like having both the wolf and the hunter pursuing Little Red Riding Hood.
Of course, this decision was not based in Aika’s personal feelings.
She had made this call because things had reached a point where she was no longer in control.
If she showed too much of her own discretion, Aika too could be labelled a “wandering asset”.
“Who has the Government sent?”
“A summoner/vessel pair with each of five Repliglass units.”
“The military? That’s not good.”
“Oh? Not the summoners?”

“You’re in Government, so you should know. If a unit focuses on fleeing, they can stop a chain and then either carpet bomb the area with freefall bombs dropped from high altitude bombers fifteen thousand meters up or fire from a cruiser out at sea beyond the horizon. If they destroy the terrain itself when you can’t even see them, there’s not much you can do. Normal firepower is the scariest thing of all. There’s a reason that’s the power that rules the world.”
“Umm, Onii-chan. This is a battle between summoners…”
“And dealing with another summoner is a lot easier. What’s the name of the strongest one?”
“Government Award 930, Golden Luxury. The president of Quad Motors, an American multinational corporation, is her father. In other words, she’s one source of our funding. She gets especially good results in complex terrain like urban areas or inside buildings. And the Material she prefers to summon is…”
She hesitated for a moment and Kyousuke realized why once she continued.
“The ‘White’ Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz). That’s one of the Unexplored-class beyond the Divine-class.”
That instantly blew away his previous mood.
Every summoner knew the name of the Queen. That Material was known as the strongest even among the Unexplored-class beyond the Regulation and Divine classes. Government, Illegal, and Freedom were in constant conflict, but ironically, all three had arrived at that exact same conclusion.
Being the strongest meant *one’s victory was assured as soon as they summoned the Queen*, but the conditions for summoning her were far too unique. It was rare for anyone to summon her in a true battle rather than a mock battle held on a vast experimental field.
However, this summoner supposedly specialized in summoning her.
This was not just a theory. In a battle of life or death, she was summoning that Material to take her enemy’s life.
“…”
He had Award 902, but that was only within Freedom and it could not be confused with the numbers within Government. Also, Kyousuke had not accepted a single job in half a year. He could not guarantee he had full use of his previous power, so he did not know if he could defeat this summoner even if he went all out.
As a side note, Award 930 was more powerful than the Aika and White Liger pair.
If this person really was capable of summoning the Queen, it was possible she would reach Award 1000.
“Do you know where Meinokawa Higan has gone?”
“If I did, I wouldn’t have called you.”
“Then where are Golden Luxury and the disciplinary units? If they’re ahead of us here, Meinokawa Higan is probably inside their dragnet.”

“…? You seem oddly motivated here, Onii-chan.”
“I never intended to just let them die. And a moment ago, I remembered something a little unpleasant.”
“They’re in R Block. They seem to be blocking the route to the harbor. But they’re in motion, so they must be searching. I’m guessing they know she’s in the area and are performing a thorough search.”
“I see…”
Kyousuke reached for his hoodie’s hood. He always kept an Incense Grenade on him. He placed it on the bedside table and pulled out the storage drawer below the bed. He had not worked for about half a year and had not really resupplied, but he had about three spare Incense Grenades. They weighed around three hundred grams, so they felt a little heavier than a can of coffee in his hands.
(That’s four in all. Wiping them out in a Hive Crusher might not be possible, but I have a chance if I just get in and get out.)
“By the way, what was the unpleasant thing you remembered?”
“Olivia Highland. My previous vessel. You remember her, right?”
“Yes, I do… I do!! She’s that cruelest of girls who ignored me and clung to your arm with an innocent smile while muttering ‘Onii-chan’ in her sleep!! Ahhh, it’s pissing me off just remembering it!!”
“That doesn’t matter right now, but do you remember the last thing she said?”
Aika fell silent for a moment.
She must have remembered because she mimicked the girl’s voice:
“Yes, but I wasn’t scared. After all, I knew you’d always come to save me, Onii-chan. Alice’s rabbit is the friend of any girl that wanders into this world! So if you wish for my happiness, then I’ll make a wish too. I hope more and more vessels like me will meet you and be given happiness. Eh heh heh. I’ll ask the White Queen!!”
Kyousuke grimaced a little.
Alice (with) Rabbit was the name given to him by a girl who had once been Alice.
“That kind of traumatized me.”
“Well, after knowing you for only a few weeks, she couldn’t have known about *your true worries*.”
“But remembering that made me realize that Meinokawa Higan might be the same, even if I only just met her today and have no real connection to her. Or maybe I should say she’s a human being who wanted to be the same.”
“Can you no longer see her as just a name on a document?”
“I don’t remember ever treating her like that. Well, now that I’m looking at it this way, I guess there’s no point in forcing myself to hold back.”
“Hmm. Then I have something to tell you as the little sister that loves her big brother.”
After a short pause, she almost seemed to whisper the rest.

“Welcome home, Onii-chan. And now it’s time to head out again.”

Part 4

With the central square at the center, Toy Dream 35 was divided up like a pizza to create twenty-six blocks labeled from A to Z. Each block had a unique concept and was named after the first letter of an English word describing that concept. However, it was not widely known what those words were, so even the residents tended not to know about any of the blocks outside the one they lived in.
Meinokawa Higan was hiding behind a flower bed.
She was in the courtyard of a perfectly normal looking school.
A new rectangular building had been constructed above the older L-shaped building and the courtyard was located at the center of that three-sided square.
More specifically, this was a high school in Toy Dream 35’s R Block. It was artificial land built over the ocean and the three hundred meter square of land was supported by about forty pillars. Giant bridges could be seen both above and below it, but that was the standard multilevel structure of this city.
The one open side of the three-sided square led to the edge of the float and the salty wind blew in despite the cliff-like difference in height.
The amusement park city never slept, but there were exceptions in places. The cold stillness of a school or hospital at night was gradually eroding the air here despite the year-round festive atmosphere.
She had no idea where her sister Renge might be.
She had simply been planning to start her search around the harbor area where they had parted ways and then to gradually widen her area of search in hopes of finding her sister or some hint that would lead to her.
But…
(Wh-what are those?)
After leaving the block the Government middleman’s apartment had been in, she had entered the central square and then walked through R Block to reach the harbor area.
That was all she had wanted to do, but she had found herself unable to make it even halfway through R Block.
She had no interest in this school, but as she had continued making detours to avoid the strange attention she was receiving, she had found herself

here. It was almost like she had been led to an open space where someone could go on a rampage.
(Are they summoners? Are they from Guard of Honor that's after my sister? …No. Th-they seem different somehow. They're different…but um, they're still dangerous!!)
As soon as she heard quite a few mechanical sounds, something had dropped down to block her way forward.
They were human. Pitch black external armor covered their bodies and they had extra legs sweeping back behind their normal two. They dropped down as if it were nothing special. For humans equipped with grasshopper-like leg units, a difference of over ten meters may have been the same as climbing or descending a flight of stairs.
But that was not all.
Units that looked like a spider body added onto a human's upper body were silently crawling along the school's walls and the bottom of the giant bridge running overhead. Water strider units with four legs sticking out were skimming along the surface of the dark water flowing below the artificial schoolyard. Fifty or sixty of these bizarre humans were blocking her way.
They were Repliglass. In a divergence from older weapons, this armor had bones, muscle, and blood made from processed silicon cells. They were the invention of the century and they had twisted the current age itself to the point of creating a new division of the military beyond infantry or tanks: Pilot Soldiers.
But despite all that, they were not the stars of the show.
Surrounded by these bizarre shapes were the residents of a world Higan recognized: a summoner and a vessel. That equipment looked like it could win a war against aliens, but those soldiers were only the eyes and ears. They would find the target and the summoner and vessel would supply the finishing blow. That was the setup.
And there was more than the one pair.
From Meinokawa Higan's position, she could see four such pairs hanging around waiting for a report to come in.
She doubted she had simply been caught in the middle of some other incident.
She did not know who they were, but she doubted they would help her in any way.
(If they're blocking the way because they know I'll pass through here, then, um, my sister must be up ahead.)
She clenched her teeth, calmed her racing pulse, and forced herself to think.
She could not fight.
She was a vessel, but without a summoner, she was only a girl.
Her death was assured the instant they found her.
(Then this is my chance. This is the way back to my sister. If I can get back to the harbor where we were separated, I can save her. So…!!)

So…
So…
So…
It took a full thirty seconds for her thoughts to continue on toward an actual course of action.
In fact, even after thirty seconds, she could not find an answer.
She was simply frozen in place.
And once she realized she had done nothing at all, it dawned on her: she was afraid.
Her skinny body was assaulted by uncontrollable shaking.
She could not move. Not even a single step. She could not move forward or even back.
She knew just how powerless she was at the moment.
If a summoner and vessel found her and attacked her with a Material, her flesh-and-blood body would be smashed to bits. Even if it was the weakest Material, no resident of this world could defeat a resident of the other world. That rule was absolute.
And even if the Repliglass soldiers were only acting as the eyes and the ears, her life was not guaranteed if they found her either. A vessel could do nothing on her own. If they attacked her with normal guns, she would be turned to Swiss cheese. If they kicked her or tackled her with their giant bodies, her bones would be crushed.
She was weak.
She was hopelessly weak.
But that was not why she was afraid.
These “excuses” kept coming to mind.
She was afraid of how her heart was giving in to all those indulgences in preparation to give up on her beloved sister.
(No…)
In a desperate attempt to bring back what little courage she had, she pictured the face of that family member who had risked her own life to protect her.
But every time she did, it was blotted out by even more excuses.
Renge’s smile, words, and scent were all lost in the blink of an eye.
(No!! I-I don’t want to lose her. I’m the only one that can save her. Even if it’s impossible, I’m the only one that can do it!! I know that. I know that, and yet…)
No matter how much she yelled in her heart, her physical body did not move a single step.
No words escaped her mouth.
She still could not move forward or back. She could only tremble in hiding in order to save herself.
It was hopelessly pathetic and hopelessly shameful, but she could not hide those thoughts.
She could not keep going.

She could not win.
She did not want to die.
She recalled the monsters she had seen at the harbor. They appeared vividly in her mind: Fafnir, Yamata-no-Orochi, and The Lady of “Purple Lightning” that Separates Good from Evil (iu – ao – eu – ei – kub – miq – a – ci – pl). As Divine and Unexplored classes, they had been special cases, but they were essentially the same. That was what happened when a human ran afoul of Materials. They could die even with the best of preparations, so it was obvious what would happen without those preparations.
Her true nature was showing itself now that she had been placed in this extreme situation, but even after seeing that, she could do nothing more than cower behind cover.
(White Queen, White Queen, White Queen! G-gr-grant me courage. Grant me the courage to save my sister even if it means sacrificing myself!!)
She prayed again and again to calm herself.
Each time, the exact opposite happened. Her mind was growing blank.
She could not stop trembling.
She could not stop it no matter what she did.
Just hiding here placed so much pressure on her that she thought she would pass out. She then realized that was because passing out would be a self-destructive yet easy way out for her.
Nothing could have been more shameful and nothing could have been more painful.
Her blank mind then recalled something pointless.
On that day, at the instant she had been separated from Renge, what had she asked for on that boat? When she had prayed to the White Queen in the same way and nothing had happened, what had her heart hoped for?
“…help…”
Something like a groan escaped her lips.
It was relying on others to the extreme. And even as she tried to escape the reality before her eyes, she could not let the Repliglass soldiers or the summoners hear her.
“Someone help…”
And as she gave her quiet plea, a human form slowly approached from behind.
“!?”
Sensing their presence, she turned around in surprise, but…
“Mgh!?”
As soon as she did, a hand covered her mouth and a great force pulled her once more behind the flower bed she had been hiding behind.
A familiar face appeared before her eyes.
It was Shiroyama Kyousuke who held a finger to his lips.
“Shh.”
“Pwah. Wh-wha-what? Um, wh-why are you-…ow!?”
She was cut off by a light chop to the head.

“What do you think *you’re* doing here?” he whispered. “That harbor is Guard of Honor’s stronghold and it’s guarded by a ton of summoners. Whether you’re searching the surrounding area on the assumption your sister is still on the run or you’re searching the inside on the assumption she’s been captured, that’s too much ground to cover. How many warehouses are there and how big are they? Aren’t there over a thousand containers piled up around there? If you searched randomly through there on your own, not even a week or two would be enough. And Guard of Honor isn’t exactly going to sit there and let you search. Right?”
“Th-then…”
“Even if you have to go there, you need to have a specific target in mind that you can rush in to reach. Without that, you won’t be saving anyone.” Kyousuke glanced out from behind the flower bed to check on the several figures throughout the courtyard and to check on the shortest route to the exit.
“Now, our current problem is the allies of justice. I can see four pairs from here and it doesn’t look like Golden Luxury is here. Maybe she’s inside one of those Hornets flying around.”
“Eh? Eh? You mean that high-level Government Award holder? S-so this really isn’t Guard of Honor?”
“They’re our enemy either way. If they love human wave attacks that use quantity over quality and they’ve sent out units wearing Repliglass designed from silicon DNA, then it has to be Government. …Not that it matters now. I can leave the low-priority explanations until later.” Kyousuke was speaking rapidly. “This is an unnecessary detour. If we’re going to find your sister, we need to get out of here safely. If you’ve had enough of those idealist fantasies and that heroic pessimism and you actually want to realistically save your sister, then help me here. A summoner can’t do anything on his own.”
“You…” Higan sounded taken aback. “*You’ll help my sister?*”
“That line is off limits. Don’t use it so carelessly.”
His voice grew unpleasantly cold there.
He pulled a small razor blade from the pocket of his sports brand track suit.
“We need to create a new contract as summoner and vessel. This will overwrite your previous contract, so you’ll lose your connection to your sister. Are you fine with that?”
“Create a contract? You mean we’re going to fight them? B-but…”
“Are you afraid?”
His blunt question caused her heart to leap in her chest. She felt like he had seen right through her.
But even at such close range, she saw no hint of disappointment on his face. He smiled a little and spoke.
“A vessel needs talent, but a summoner doesn’t. Every summoner begins with the Original series and has to work up to more and more powerful Materials. You don’t get a convenient seed position from your bloodline, an

item you inherited, or special training. Do you understand what I'm getting at?"
"…?"
"Even the greatest expert has to start at the beginning and even the lowest rookie has a chance of using the strongest Material. All of the fear you just felt can become a powerful weapon if you use it. …So I'm not telling you not to be afraid. Our style is to *feel that fear and then smile because you now have a new method to add to your repertoire*."
He was not just idealistically denying the existence of the darkness in her heart.
"Summoners have no limits on the Materials we can summon and those Materials can be swapped out any number of times, but that isn't because we want so many weapons. We have a single path to our goal and all else – even the gods – are only stepping stones used to reach it. It's both an all-purpose tool and the greatest blasphemy. In this cheating game of rock-paper-scissors, the optimum answer changes from person to person. Depending on the situation, the identity of the trump cards and the worthless cards can change entirely. So if you want to win, you have to find your own path. *Even if that starts from fear.*"
He accepted and even approved of her weak and fearful heart.
As soon as she heard that, the trembling of her body came to a stop.
She had learned this ugliness was not hers alone.
She had learned the boy in front of her had once felt this same fear and overcome it.
She had learned there was a way to overcome it.
They were only words. They were only sound waves vibrating the air. They took on a completely different form from the White Queen that people worshiped as the concentrated ideal of all things. This was a human sort of salvation that differed from that extreme sanctity that did not allow a single drop of corruption.
"Let's get started."
Kyousuke used the razor blade to make a shallow cut on his right hand's index finger. When a bead of blood appeared there, he held it out toward Higan…or more accurately, her lips.
"I bind this covenant of blood in the name of The Spirit of Fluttering 'Yellow' Gills that Rules the Heavens (s – a – so – voz – tix – ei – yw – za), one of the Three which manage and guide the summoning ceremony. You are of human flesh with a proper heart and soul, yet from this moment onward, you shall be a limited vessel that can hold all things."
Higan stared blankly at the fingertip and red blood held out toward her mouth. Each word forced open her heart and exposed the invisible connector needed to bind this new contract.
"You shall be a lord of emptiness that uses the power filling you to at times bend the laws of this world."

An ominous sharpness entered the air. They could no longer hide because Government's summoners would have already detected the change.
But it did not matter as long as they could complete the contract.
"So I shall prepare this vessel. I am a summoner, unable to leave the world of man, yet a symbol of haughty intellect that uses power from beyond the world of man to guide the world of man to the next age!!"
Meinokawa Higan licked the bloody finger, placed it between her lips, and took it into her mouth.
She swallowed.
That was the beautiful and somewhat suggestive contract ceremony.
The single drop of blood used magical power to explosively rearrange her entire body. Her five senses were stirred up and her mind was briefly thrown into a psychedelically colorful world.
Shiroyama Kyousuke caught her slender body as she wobbled dizzily.
Her contract had been overwritten, so there was no need to hide any longer. He and his newly-acquired vessel girl stepped out below a bright streetlight.
He reached for his back and pulled something from behind his hoodie's neck. It was a 180 cm rod made of Repliglass. It normally hid behind his back like a coiled snake, but it had returned to its normal shape and size.
It was a Blood-Sign, the symbol of a summoner.
As everyone's focus turned his way, he spoke.
"Despite what I said, you don't need to fear anything else tonight. You aren't alone. And…"
She was not a pitiable girl who could only fearfully wait for death.
Nor was she a burden that had to be protected by some great strength.
This was how he saw her.
"Right now, you are the Alice with the Rabbit."
That was Freedom Award 902.
In that moment, a fight began between the summoners who would leave behind countless legends.

Facts

- There are three major powers: Government, Illegal, and Freedom. They manage their summoners with their own Award systems. They have each made a contract with one of the three great Materials standing at the peak of either the low, middle, or high sounds and the Awards are directly carved into the souls of

summoners as formless rewards from the residents of *the other side*.

- Guard of Honor is a new group gathering power in Illegal, but the details are unknown.
- When people involved with Materials, such as summoners and vessels, earn Award 100, they leave the awareness of normal people. They can speak with normal people as long as they are in their field of vision, but the people will forget about them as soon as they leave their field of vision.
- A summoner and a vessel form a pair by binding a contract. If both of them fully consent, then a new contract can be made. (This does not work under duress, while unconscious, while hypnotized, or under the influence of other forms of suggestion.) This overwrites the previous contract and no thought is given to the other member of the old pair. There are many mysteries about this system, so there is a possibility of unexpected side effects.
- Even the lowest rookie and the greatest expert must begin with the weakest Material, but in exchange, anyone has a chance of reaching the most powerful Material.
- The “White” Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz) is the most powerful even among the Unexplored-class, but the method of summoning her is so unique that she is rarely summoned outside of mock battles and ceremonies.
- The types of Awards and the conditions for earning them differ between the three powers. The more one earns, the more inhuman they become. Upon earning 1000, their affiliation between this world and the other world reverses, making them a resident of the other side while still alive.

Stage 02: The Rabbit is Alice’s Guide

「お嬢様」

「ええ、始めましょう」

(Stage 02 Open 04/15 00:30)

ステージ02

ウサギはアリスの案内人

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Milady.”
“Yes, let’s get started.”
(Stage 02 Open 04/15 00:30)
The Rabbit is Alice’s Guide

Part 1

Government Award 930, Golden Luxury.
Her real name was Azalea Magentarain. The girl seemed too delicate even for her young age of fourteen. She had smooth white skin, transparently blue eyes, and extremely long reddish blonde hair. Her ringlet curls were long enough to reach her waist.
She wore what looked like a business suit with a tight skirt, but it also had frills and lace in places. It was of course custom made. She would never be allowed to touch a premade product that could have been soaked with any number of strange chemicals.
She elegantly crossed her legs in the cargo space of a mid-sized vibration wing craft known as a Hornet.
A Hornet was an armored weapon meant for ground attacks and personnel transport in place of helicopters. It was fifteen meters long and it went without saying what its silicon shell was shaped to resemble. It was of course more than a hobby item. It used various deception weapons and its four rapidly vibrating wings created unique lifelike movements. It had achieved overwhelming results in tests, only being hit by one of fifty surface-to-air missiles and by zero of fifty air-to-air missiles.
Recently, Repliglass had been used for more than just military and construction purposes. A giant one hundred meter silicon core had been closed in a concrete box for a new type of power plant. It only consumed water and earth (or silicon waste like glass and silicone), so it was being touted as an environmentally friendly energy source. The lights decorating Toy Dream 35’s night came from the massive energy produced by that Repliglass core.
Inside that cutting-edge weapon, the girl held several colorful disks two centimeters thick and ten centimeters in diameter.
They were reels of silk ribbon.
“What do you think? If I want high speeds and am expecting a long match, then I think it would be best to shift the Blood-Sign’s center of gravity a little farther forward than normal and to make it a little thinner. I think #6 would be best.”

Her dignified voice resembled a Buddhist monk's bell used to drive out impurities and its loveliness overwrote the surrounding atmosphere.
A single person was listening.
Due to its lifelike movements, the Hornet shook quite a bit, yet the old man in a suit stood perfectly straight.
He was her vessel and his name was Fractal Leskins.
Normally, vessels wore handcuffs, a collar, or other tools that bound them in order to avoid summoning something "unnecessary" beyond what their summoner ordered of them, but this old man wore nothing of the sort. Or rather, his suit itself was the symbol of the servitude binding him. It had grown that way over many long years.
"If you wish to suppress his movements with a series of swift attacks, I would suggest the thick, short, and heavy #5. Or if you would prefer to attack from outside his field of vision by avoiding obstacles with a spin, then what about #12?"
"No, if I'm going up against him, it's going to be a frenetic battle from extreme close range. There will be no easy victory here. So don't you think it would be best to take the time to build up the ideal form?"
"Ha ha. My aging eyes are no match for your discerning vision. Then I suppose #6 would be best."
Azalea and Fractal could achieve a certain level of results in any environment, but they still had their preferences. They preferred a high speed battle in an urban environment. That was their territory.
The girl re-crossed her legs and did not even glance at the old man who respectfully lowered his head. This was nothing special. In Azalea Magentarain's life, this was no different from drinking water or breathing oxygen. She did not think much of it, but she would be in trouble without it. That was who he was to her.
"Freedom Award 902, Alice (with) Rabbit, is it?"
"We only have a report from the men down below, so it could be a fake," said Azalea while grabbing the pink reel labelled #6. "Still, it would be wise to be careful. And if it really is him, nothing could be better. It's been so long since I had a satisfying battle."
When using an Incense Grenade, summoners and vessels could not be seen by mechanical cameras and sensors. Precision GPS-guided bombs and cruise missiles could not be used for a surprise attack. That was why no unmanned devices were being used as the summoners' eyes and ears. They were forced to rely on hearsay from their subordinates and they had to assume their target could vanish from the monitor at any moment.
However, Government's infantry were not normal soldiers. They were all new summoners who had been late to acquire a vessel. A lot of them died before being promoted, but those that fought through a true battlefield without a vessel gained quite a bit of power. Those who knew fear and had conquered it were strong.

Tentatively deciding to trust the reports from those novices still going through their baptism of blood, Azalea brought the radio mic to her mouth. She spoke to the Hornet's pilot.
"What is the hold up? When are we going to reach the location in the report?"
"Our ETA is ten minutes from now."
"Make it five. If you don't, the five units in Block R will be wiped out."
"B-but…"
She switched off the radio without waiting for the response and she spoke to the old man next to her.
"What is the meaning of this? I personally designed this Hornet and its speed and mobility are its selling points. Is it malfunctioning?"
"I am sorry to say it, but I believe they are worried that shaking the craft too much could harm you."
"Ridiculous," spat out Azalea Magentarain.
The old man gently continued.
"Four groups of Government Elites from Award 501 to 780 were deployed. Don't you think they have enough pride to fulfill their roles?"
"You say that, but you don't actually think they can win, do you?"
Azalea and Fractal were not simply looking down on their subordinates. She had more going for her than being from a wealthy family and being a high Award summoner.
Quad Motors was the world's greatest defense contractor that supplied cutting-edge weaponry for all four branches of the American military. These two were deeply involved in the core of that corporation. They did not design tanks using the knowhow of the automobile industry. They designed them as weapons from the ground up.
Most of her family had intentionally left themselves at around Award 50 so they would not vanish from normal society while also properly perceiving summoners. High Award summoners like Azalea were an extreme exception for her family.
On top of that, her family was not technically an American power. Quad Motors had ruled the defense industry in place of the big names of the domestic automobile and aviation industries who had lost the ability to compete, but they were in fact a Trojan Horse sent by the Round Table, a European alliance of nobility, because they were unwilling to let those "newcomers" of the New World hold the position of the world police.
They were a family of unrepatriated golden birds of prey who had sharply honed military knowledge, development skills, and financial knowhow yet possessed the iron will needed to cast aside their position of nobility to secure American citizenship as immigrants, infiltrate the field of national defense, acquire political power, and achieve their goal.
For that reason, their opinions were surprisingly cold yet accurate.
"Award 501, Perfect Game. Award 590, Tricky AAA. Award 719, Diabolos. Award 780, Bloodbath Rhapsody. …They're all useless. Especially 501. Is

that supposed to be a joke? He probably only has a perfect record because he only ever finishes off the losers that another summoner let live. Can't he at least die here?"
"We will arrive in ten minutes, but the units deployed there will be wiped out. So what should we do?"
"Hand it over."
The old man immediately complied with the girl's brief instruction. That summed up just how long the two had known each other.
The butler held out a giant tube made of layered plastic. It was 130 centimeters long and the bottom surface was equipped with a cushion for the shoulder.
Azalea did not hesitate to rest it on her shoulder and Fractal forcefully slid open the cargo door on the Hornet's side.
A chilly night wind struck the girl's delicate body, but she did not even flinch. In fact, she gained a challenging look of fierce joy.
She stared at one point of the night scenery and spoke to the pilot over the radio.
"Sorry, but it looks like I will have to make up for everyone's incompetence."
The giant tube was in fact an 80mm *grenade* launcher.
And if a summoner was going to put all of her trust in a single projectile, it could only be one thing.
She rested the launcher on her shoulder and smoothly whispered under her breath.
"Oh, White Queen who guides us to victory in extraordinary battles, please save this fragile human soul."

Part 2

In the courtyard of the Block R high school that Shiroyama Kyousuke attended on weekdays, everything looked like death to Meinokawa Higan.
Repliglass weapons were partially or entirely modeled on insects and other animals. They were the armored weapons of a new age and they had drawn a clear line between themselves and all previously existing weapons.
Regenerative medicine was used to create all-purpose silicon cells which could be rearranged to form any kind of muscle, bone, nerves, blood vessels, internal organs, or sensory organs. Simply put, anyone wearing that armor took on the role of an intelligent beast that did not exist anywhere on earth.

And those weapons were commanded by four summoner-vessel pairs. Their summoning ceremony could summon life forms not of this world on a limited basis, so they could ignore even the laws of physics and in some cases achieve results not even a great Repliglass army could. …Including incidents involving paranormal phenomena that traditional military might was helpless against.
And yet Meinokawa Higan heard a loud noise.
With his long Blood-Sign in hand, Shiroyama Kyousuke left her behind and took a large step toward the enemy.
The nearest summoner responded by throwing something like a can of coffee toward him. Needless to say, it was an Incense Grenade. At the same time, the Repliglass soldiers moved back. Once a battle between summoners began, normal bullets would be useless. Leaving the fight to the summoner was the standard tactic and that was how they distributed their duties here.
Finally, two summoners would wield the paranormal to fight.
But in that moment, Higan saw something unbelievable.
Freedom Award 902, Alice (with) Rabbit, held up his Blood-Sign like a baseball bat.
With a solid metallic clang, he swung the Blood-Sign and scored a homerun with the Incense Grenade. In just an instant, it vanished in the dark sea beyond the large high school campus.
And…
“Ah.”
While watching the grenade disappear, the summoner seemed to belatedly realize what that meant.
When an Incense Grenade detonated, the summoner and vessel who had used it were carried to the center of the Artificial Sacred Ground.
“Bfgrfeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeehhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!???”
As if they were connected to a passenger jet by an elastic cord, the summoner and vessel became two stars in the night sky.
The boy ran further forward and spoke coolly.
“Award 501: defeated.”
“You…!!”
The female summoner he turned to as his next target dropped an Incense Grenade at her feet. He could not hope for another homerun from this distance and he only had three to five seconds until it detonated.
But by that time, Shiroyama Kyousuke had already moved right up to his next target.
However, that target was *not* the female summoner.
He suddenly changed direction and moved right up to one of the bizarre Repliglass soldiers that had grasshopper-like legs added near the waist to help with jumping. The soldier was a sturdy armored weapon, but the carbine he held was a standard model. Kyousuke made a spear-like jab with

the tip of his 180 cm stick to tear off the high-powered military light attached on the bottom.
At the same time, the counterattack began. The enemy selected the face out of the many vitals available and threw a frightening kick with its silicon leg. This rear leg held the strength needed to send the soldier himself flying ten to twenty meters or to crush a traditional armored truck like a steamed bun.
Shiroyama Kyousuke swung his upper body to avoid it by a hair's breadth. A few of his own hairs flew through the air.
His entire body was noticeably emitting extreme tension.
His cheeks twitched as he moved his Blood-Sign. Swinging it down like a hammer would not harm the pilot soldier contained inside the silicon muscles and armor, but he was not foolish enough to think he could destroy that armored weapon like that.
He was targeting something else.
The carbine in the bizarre weapon's hand had been made as small as possible while completely ignoring the recoil of firing. The powerful military light that had been torn from the bottom used a honeycomb pattern of bright LEDs and it was meant to blind an opponent rather than provide illumination.
Kyousuke caught the rotating light on the tip of his Blood-Sign, pulled it back toward him, grabbed it, and switched it on.
"Oh, no…" muttered the female summoner preparing for battle with her Blood-Sign held up like a spear.
Incense Grenades are only effective when the target can be seen with the naked eye.
Despite the muffled explosion, no Artificial Sacred Ground appeared. The flashlight was as bright as a strobe light and it had blinded her. She could not summon a Material into her vessel like this.
That brief opening was all Kyousuke needed.
He threw aside the light and stuck a hand into his pocket. He pulled out a metal can as heavy as a can of hair spray: an Incense Grenade. He threw it to the side, but not to fight like normal. He was trying to break the female summoner's nose with the three hundred gram mass.
Caught off guard, she was unable to evade or defend.
After a metallic sound of impact, the blow hit her square in the face and she collapsed onto her back.
The grim reaper whispered his next statement.
"Award 719: defeated."
(Not good…)
Finally, the surrounding Repliglass soldiers changed their way of thinking.
(The normal distribution of duties won't work here. Leaving this to the summoners will only get us defeated!!)
They too would be his prey if they left this to the experts. Fortunately, this target had yet to use a summoning ceremony. Unless he activated the

protective circle created from the Material's power, he was no different from any other human. Normal bullets would fill him with holes like normal.
Their expected victory had crumbled before their eyes, they had restrained their confusion, they had swapped out their way of thinking, and they had begun to take action. All in all, it had taken four seconds.
Everyone there accurately aimed their guns and pulled the trigger.
Those battlefield soldiers recovered and reacted with extraordinary speed.
However, they had forgotten something.
The projectile used to break the summoner's nose had not been a mere weight; it had been an Incense Grenade.
The slight explosion drowned out all else.
Gunfire rang from the Repliglass soldiers at almost the exact same moment as the Alice (with) Rabbit boy used his Blood-Sign to hit the white sphere – a White Thorn – in front of him.
The deluge of noise seemed to continue without end, but not even one of the bullets tore into Kyousuke's body.
He and Higan had been automatically taken to the location of the detonating Incense Grenade.
The Repliglass soldiers quickly corrected their aim, but it was too late.
The Rose pieces floating in the air were knocked about, a middle sound Petal was accurately sucked into a Spot, and Higan's body changed form with a sticky sound. She became a three meter mass of a translucent green sticky liquid. That Material contained the girl's body at its center.
At the cost of one middle sound, it was one of the weakest Materials, the Original Green (k).
But even if it was one of the weakest, a Material was still a Material. A protective circle that eliminated all attacks was immediately constructed around the summoner and that defended against the countless bullets.
And of course, at the same time…
"Higan! Take out the Repliglass soldiers!! They don't stand a chance now!!"
<Wow…>
Higan moved with her body transformed into a giant sticky Material.
With the roar reminiscent of sandbags being hit by a barrage of blows, the soldiers were easily swept away. Higan freely controlled the seven hundred liters of her body. Despite being liquid, each strike was as flexible as the human fist yet filled with an impact rivalling a car accident. She understood that she was the one doing this, but she started to lose her awareness of that fact.
<I always thought summoning ceremonies were about who could summon the more powerful Material with the more effective sound range… This Original series only costs one sound, so, um, I thought it was just a starting point with no real use.>
She went on a rampage inside the Artificial Sacred Ground field where she could use her occult power to its fullest. As she accurately knocked the

cutting-edge armored soldiers unconscious, she felt a strange feeling running through that body that was not hers.
<But I was wrong. He even knows, um, how to fight with the weakest Material. No, did this battle begin b-before even summoning the first Material!?>
Yes. That was right.
When Higan had been separated from Renge in that harbor region, Kyousuke had saved her from the Guard of Honor pursuers.
But he would not have had a vessel with him then. So how had he protected her from those members of a professional summoner's organization?
<Th-this must be…the answer.>
He could get involved in the world of summoning ceremonies and yet return alive without summoning a single Material. He could return with at least a single person in his arms. And he did not have the muscular strength of some ferocious beast, he was not a kung fu master living deep in the mountains, and he was not using the world's greatest prototype weapon that a stranger had given him.
Then again, he was not the same as Lu Niang Lan who was feared as the Perfect Dragon. He was not an expert in slaughtering veteran summoners using only his own body and hidden weapons instead of Materials.
But when in a bind, he knew enough about this small field to put together a workable strategy *on the fly* that would let him fight without a Material.
It could be written off as a series of adlibs, but he did not bring about the optimum result by gambling. He simply had enough useful experience to instantly search for the relevant information in any given situation. He may have been physically using his arms and legs, but his true weapon was his intellect as a summoner.
That had been enough to save a girl from that hellish harbor, so he would not lose here.
Shiroyama Kyousuke could gain the upper hand against Guard of Honor with a handicap, so there was no way he would lose when he had Meinokawa Higan as his vessel and could use his full power.
"Higan, focus on weight more than speed! Repliglass is a mass of silicon muscle fibers, so they won't be able to move if you press down on them enough to snap them. You don't even need to knock them out. Destroy the outer shell and they'll be trapped in their own armor!!"
Shiroyama Kyousuke ran all across the Artificial Sacred Ground and Higan swung her giant Material body around based on his instructions. Repliglass soldiers were the main players of modern warfare and they were a symbol of fear for the guerillas and terrorists being wiped out around the world, but she easily swept them all away.
They were gone in no time at all. Things were progressing almost too smoothly.
She felt like she was watching an example video, so the victory did not feel like hers.

“Dammit!!!!”
Two summoners remained. Someone with devastatingly slow reaction speed quickly raised their Blood-Sign and struck a White Thorn. To Higan, the movement was slow, like someone moving underwater.
And Kyousuke did not just sit idly by.
He took a powerful step forward and charged toward the enemy summoner.
By this point, Higan had caught on that even that step had a meaning. If he had only been swinging around his Blood-Sign randomly, he would have been shot up by the Repliglass soldiers before the Incense Grenade could detonate. His movements also had the psychological effect of creating a gap and throwing off one’s timing.
If someone who could easily jump to either side instead charged straight toward the large truck driving their way, anyone watching would be briefly paralyzed with shock.
A baseball would sometimes slip between two infielders who could have easily caught it.
This was the same.
He seemed almost supernaturally skilled at binding the enemy’s body with a stimulus that they could not fight with their rational mind.
He took a short breath, shot forward like a bullet, and literally collided with the enemy summoner.
Both of them were guarded by the protective circles powered by their Materials, so they did not actually come into contact.
With a solid sound of impact, Kyousuke’s charge was obstructed at extreme close range. Both of their protective circles had decided allowing him in range would bring death.
But…
“Kh…!? Wh-what…? You’re in the way…”
“You can’t see the world behind me, can you? And when we’re this close, you can’t swing your 180 cm Blood-Sign like you want to. Isn’t that right?”
A summoner could freely build up their Material by gaining an accurate understanding of the vast Artificial Sacred Ground and using their glowing White Thorns to knock the Petals of low, middle, high, and lowest sounds into the Spots. The pressure tactics that Shiroyama Kyousuke was using with his own body produced a simple yet devastating effect.
“B-but neither can-…!”
The summoner trailed off as he finally noticed the sound of something whipping through the wind.
Kyousuke had reached both hands behind his back and spun his Blood-Sign like a baton.
With a top-class summoner’s spatial awareness, one did not always need to rely on sight. He could manipulate his Blood-Sign behind his back to accomplish the exceedingly precise summoning ceremony.
The tip struck a White Thorn with enough frightening speed to sense the absolute confidence behind it.

With several hard sounds of reflection, it collided with several Petals and knocked them into Spots. The crimson trails of light and the dance of a broken song filled that small world.
He did not even bother to check on the result.
“……”
The poor summoner looked up at something with a blank look in his eyes.
A giant Material towered behind Shiroyama Kyousuke. The giant squid monster had gold eyes and ten thick chains that could probably squeeze a tank. It was the DEC Tentacle (nu – o – re – a – btv – ag – y).
The summoner currently had a human-sized Material with green eyes known as the Sharp Mermaid (nal – cb a – pl), but the difference in cost was too great and the matchup between sound range could not have been worse.
It would be killed in a single blow.
The Silhouette at the mermaid’s core that contained the vessel’s mind would be destroyed.
Unpleasant sweat poured from the summoner’s body and the grim reaper’s quiet voice slipped into his ears.
“Award 780: defeated.”

Part 3

The giant Hornet tore through the night sky that was filled with city lights. The side cargo door was fully open and Azalea Magentarain had finally spotted her target with her “naked eye” through the optical sight of the 80mm grenade launcher on her shoulder.
He was a few kilometers away and he was only a tiny speck even through the multiple lenses.
“Freedom Award 902, Alice (with) Rabbit. Confirmed.”
A school had become a battlefield.
She had expected it, but not even disastrous was enough to describe the situation. The four summoner groups had already been defeated and the soldiers wearing Repliglass equipment supplied by Quad Motors had been wiped out. *And they had all been incapacitated without spilling a single drop of blood.*
The girl felt a little faint at the fact that the enemy had showed mercy. She could feel the noble blood stirring inside her delicate body.
“Alice (with) Rabbit… Even if they were grunts, he has the nerve to mock their resolve to die if necessary!?”

“Milady, everything is prepared. You may begin at any time.”
The elderly butler knew Azalea better than anyone and his words cooled her boiling head. No, perhaps it would be more accurate to say they lowered it from an intense burn to a calmer burn.
They did not particularly care who the master was and which one was in control.
The girl did not hesitate to pull the trigger on her company’s own device.
With the deep sound of incendiary gas bursting out, a large explosive flew accurately to the courtyard of a high school in Block R.
According to their rules, when an Incense Grenade detonated, the summoner and vessel who had used it were carried to the center of the Artificial Sacred Ground.

Part 4

Shiroyama Kyousuke had sensed that presence.
It was a stinging tension and a dense premonition of death that nearly left one unable to control their body. Yet it contradictorily stirred up the combat instincts that wanted to give in to that feeling. He had detected this great presence not with his five senses, but with a sixth sense only held by those who had spent a long time on the battlefield.
That was why he ran across the courtyard at full speed.
He ran to the edge of the three hundred meter Artificial Sacred Ground and he immediately gave his instructions.
“Higan!! Destroy the ground! Hurry!!”
<Eh? Eh!?>
“Don’t question it!!”
The time loss may not have added up to a full second, but it was enough for Kyousuke to lose sight of his victory. The odds were dragged down to 50/50.
Finally, the DEC Tentacle’s thick chains swung down with tremendous force and smashed half the artificial ground – the courtyard that included one end of the square campus – like it was made of tofu.
They were currently in the chain state that began after defeating a target. They had the special privilege of free movement during that time and they used it to fall straight down. This was Toy Dream 35, the giant amusement park city located over the ocean. The ground had been intentionally flooded and the transportation network had bene built up above using several layers of giant bridges.
So what was it that awaited them down below?

Part 5

In the frustrating but short time needed for the arrival and detonation of the fired Incense Grenade, Azalea Magentarain saw the truth through the lenses of the optical sight.
“Below them is…a reverse bungee!? Honestly, this is the problem with entertainment for the masses!!”
A reverse bungee was the opposite of a bungee jump in that it launched people upwards. A seat was fixed at the center of a thick piece of rubber that was attached on either end to a metal pole. It might be simpler to think of it as a giant slingshot with a seatbelt attached. The sides of the metal poles were engraved with the high school’s name, so it may have actually been a school event. Anything was possible in this amusement park city.
Of course, it was blatantly obvious what would happen if it was used without the safety harness.
Azalea clenched her teeth as her Incense Grenade finally landed on the outer edge just short of the destroyed part of the ground. It immediately detonated.
(Make it.)
The user of an Incense Grenade was automatically taken to the center of the created Artificial Sacred Ground. If she could arrive on the scene before her target left, she could deal with the rest herself.
(Make it!!)
As soon as the distant Incense Grenade detonated, Azalea Magentarain and Fractal Leskins of the Golden Luxury team were launched from the aircraft with tremendous force. Rather than fall, they sliced through the air. They ignored gravity and air resistance while slipping between buildings like precision guided missiles.
Their shaken vision finally stabilized, but Azalea’s brow wrinkled in displeasure.
Alice (with) Rabbit had been slightly faster.
He and his Material had fallen into the six-person party seat of the large reverse bungee. The DEC Tentacle’s great weight caused the entire device to bend and one of its ten chains slithered out like a living creature to smash the safety hook. The great force built up in the thick rubber was released and they were launched diagonally upward. To provide a greater thrill, they shot toward the ocean which contained height differences thanks to the giant bridges on the lowest level.
They were not captured by Azalea’s Artificial Sacred Ground.

At the same time, the giant squid Material was replaced by a girl in a shrine maiden outfit. Shiroyama Kyousuke had chosen to end his chain that could last up to ninety seconds, so their Artificial Sacred Ground vanished.

There was an obvious reason for that.
For only a brief instant, Alice (with) Rabbit and Golden Luxury passed by within a few centimeters of each other.
If he had let his Artificial Sacred Ground remain, Azalea would have been caught in his field and the battle would have continued. That was exactly what the girl wanted, but the boy refused.
“Curse you…”
Time seemed to stop and their eyes met.
There was a small but unmistakable smile in Shiroyama Kyousuke’s eyes.
His goal was not to win this battle; it was to retrieve Meinokawa Higan and escape.
Such a powerful foe was within arm’s reach and yet the match would end before she could fight him.
However, this would not qualify as a draw. Given the situation, he was quitting while he was ahead.
How great was the humiliation and regret of being defeated without crossing swords even once?
The girl’s noble blood boiled over.
“Curse yooooooooooooooouuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!!!!!”
Their intersection came to an end.
The speed of time returned to normal. Azalea Magentarain and her elderly butler slipped down to land on the edge of the school’s smashed artificial ground while Shiroyama Kyousuke and Meinokawa Higan vanished into the dark sea far in the distance.
The girl’s Blood-Sign was made of wrapped pink ribbons and she slammed it down at her feet. Fractal Leskins gave a respectful bow and made a suggestion.
“We have the Water Striders on the ocean surface and the Bottlenose Dolphins inside the ocean. If you order them to search for-…”
“It’s no use. Do you really think they would find anything?”
Azalea stared at the dark sea and spoke the words like she was spitting on the coward who had fled from her.
Having lost sight of her target, that golden bird of prey said one thing more.
“I know you’re wandering around the hunting grounds, wild rabbit. You had better entertain me next time.”

Part 6

“Oh, dear. So that’s why you’re shivering from the cold,” said Lu Niang Lan of Illegal with a light of both exasperation and admiration in her blue eyes. She stood behind the counter of a used goods store in the large Chinatown of Block C.
The store was dimly-lit, it smelled of sweet incense, and the walls and columns were red. It was so red that one had to wonder if buildings in China were really quite that red. That was hardly surprising given this Chinatown had not developed naturally. The entire Block had been constructed as a film set for the kung fu movies distributed by the Toy Dream Company. In other words, it was the unrealistic image of China that Westerners pictured in their heads.
Incidentally, those movies included one with a shirtless muscular protagonist chaining two shotguns together like nunchucks and swinging them around while shooting in every direction. That should give you a good idea of how unrealistic this Chinatown was.
“…”
“…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke and Meinokawa Higan were shivering with chilly water dripping from their hair.
After landing in the ocean near the school in Block R, they had boarded his cruiser home that he had secretly moored nearby. From there, they had used the canals to reach Block C. They had showered and changed clothes on the way, but that had not fully rid them of the chill that had soaked them to the bone.
They had come to this store for two reasons.
First, to stock up on equipment such as Incense Grenades. The contents of an Incense Grenade had to be delicately mixed for the specific summoner who would use it, so they could not use one stolen from an enemy. A summoner either made their own or relied on a specialist.
The second was to gather information.
“Your hair is wet, Kyousuke-chan, but why are your clothes the same as always?”
“I have several pairs of the same clothes.”
“And why is Higan-chan wearing a maid outfit? And a miniskirt one at that.”
“Because the only girl’s clothing I had were the ones you forced on me when you were drunk a while back! Why did you even give a guy a miniskirt maid outfit!?”
Even if the cruiser was equipped for daily life, it did not have a washing machine or dryer. They would use too much water and power. Her wet shrine maiden outfit was soaking in a tub of water, but they needed to visit a laundromat before long. Otherwise, it would stiffen up from the seawater.
However, that revelation led the beauty in a modified China dress to lean over the counter.
“That was the only girl’s clothing you had? Then! Does that mean what I think it means!?”

“What?”
“Holy Shrine Maiden Higan-chan isn’t wearing anything under there!?”
“Tch!! I was doing my best not to think about that, so why did you have to be so blunt about it!?”
Anyone would have noticed at a glance, but Meinokawa Higan was blushing, holding down the maid outfit’s miniskirt with one hand, and fidgeting her legs. Someone who did not know the situation would have assumed she needed to use the restroom.
“(Oh, Wh-White Queen. Give me the noble heart needed to endure this extreme humili-hyah! I-I bit my tongue…!!)”
The sexy oriental beauty seemed to overflow with energy when she saw the shrine maiden muttering under her breath again.
“Th-this is some high level stuff. You’re this girl’s only chance at survival, but not only do you order her to wear a maid outfit, you don’t let her wear any underwear and then take her for a walk around Chinatown in the middle of the night. How high level can you get, Kyousuke-chan!?”
“Please stop smiling like that! Forcing her to wear my boxers would be pretty perverted too, wouldn’t it!? I-I had no choice! What else was I supposed to do!?”
Meinokawa Higan could not get a word in as the other two argued.
Was this really the Alice (with) Rabbit who had ruled that battlefield not long before?
The difference was so great that she was not sure how to approach him from now on and she began panicking a little.
Lu Niang Lan must have seen through that because she grinned and asked Higan a question.
“Are you worried because you can’t get a read on Kyousuke-chan’s character?”
“Eh? Um…”
“The answer is that everything you see there is a part of him. Show him your cleavage and he’ll grow flustered. Give him a teary upturned look and he’ll do most anything you say. Remember that because it’ll be on the test. And the clincher is ‘Help-…”
“Please stop telling her more than she needs to know!!”
Kyousuke loudly and quickly cut her off.
The modified China dress woman worked at cooling herself down and spoke to Higan again.
“Anyway, Higan-chan, don’t worry. Based on what I’ve heard, there’s nothing to worry about for the moment.”
“Eh? Um, uh, what do you mean?”
“Now that you’ve teamed up with Kyousuke-chan, the two of you have been registered as the new Freedom Award 902, Alice (with) Rabbit. That means you’re no longer the kind of wandering asset that Government sees as a threat.”
“B-but, um, will they really accept it that easily?”

“Not normally, no. But while Illegal is legitimately their enemy, Government actually works with and hires summoners from Freedom. …They could eventually kill Alice (with) Rabbit, but it’s more efficient to tame you than to accept the many sacrifices it would take to defeat you. Government as a whole gains very little by forcing the two of you to fight. They’re also indebted to a certain someone☆”
“Anyway,” added Shiroyama Kyousuke as if to urge caution. “That’s really only wishful thinking, so don’t get too optimistic. That may be true of Government as a whole, but there’s still a decent chance Golden Luxury will attack as an individual. After all, we picked a fight with her, threw sand in her face, and ran off. …She’s got to be pissed right now.”
Higan let out a trembling groan.
That summoner was skilled enough for even Kyousuke to decide fleeing was the best plan. It scared her to have a monster like that know her name and face.
“A-and she specializes in the White Queen. That’s *the* White Queen, isn’t it?”
Her face had gone completely pale and Kyousuke sounded a little annoyed as he answered.
“Yes. It’s that queen you love so much. …And she doesn’t just pray to her. She wields her power as a deadly weapon.”
Higan’s face only grew paler.
The noble being ruling her mind would now bare her fangs as an enemy. Merely imagining that scene was probably enough to nearly faint, but that was the world of summoners.
“The Unexplored-class are beyond all of the Regulation and Divine-class Materials and she stands at the peak of even the Unexplored-class… W-we even worship her as, um, our shrine’s unofficial second god.”
“Well, she is the most popular.” Lu Niang Lan laughed while resting her elbow on the counter. “Even in this store, the White Queen sculptures and plates sell the best. Government, Illegal, and Freedom each have a contract with one of the Three to receive their Awards, but in truth, all of them think the White Queen is the strongest.”
“A-and we’ve made enemies of someone who summons her to fight?”
“In the world of summoning ceremonies, the lowest rookie and the most skilled expert have an equal chance of summoning any Material. You can’t measure someone’s strength based on what they *can* summon.”
Kyousuke and Lu Niang Lan were both carefree.
Could experience really change someone that much?
“But now it looks like you can focus on the main issue here. Based on what you’ve said, this new organization called Guard of Honor attacked you and your twin sister, separating the two of you. You want to meet up with your missing sister before she’s killed and the time limit would be…two days now that it’s past midnight. That was your original goal, right?”

“Lu-san… Um, I’d heard Guard of Honor is a dangerous new organization that’s been gathering a lot of strength in Illegal lately.”
“Hmm. But I’ve never heard of them.”
The altered China dress woman sounded indifferent. She felt no obligation just because she was also part of Illegal. The Russian mafia would feel no responsibility if a South American drug cocktail was being misused, so this was probably a similar way of looking at it. Illegal had their own issues to deal with.
“You twins got your information from Government, right? Can you really trust that? And…”
“And?”
“If this is an unregistered group using the Illegal name without permission…don’t you think a legit Illegal member like me would be able to tell at a glance?”

Part 7

Shiroyama Kyousuke could not believe his eyes.
This was due to a fifty-by-fifty centimeter cardboard box about fifteen centimeters tall. It was stuffed full of Incense Grenades just like an industrial box of drink cans.
“Lu-san, this is way too many. How am I supposed to carry all these!?”
“Divide the extras up between your cruiser and coin lockers. It’ll be a pain coming back here every time you run out, won’t it? More importantly, how about you replace your Blood-Sign’s tip? You don’t want to complain about poor maintenance if you’re attacked without warning.”
Lu Niang Lan messed with the laptop on the used goods store counter while recommending him all sorts of equipment. That included a short-bladed knife for handicraft work, fine waterproofed sandpaper, and instant glue.
Meinokawa Higan’s eyes opened wide when she saw it all. They all looked like tools for home carpentry or summer projects, so she could not imagine how they could help in a summoning ceremony that could reach even the ancient gods.
“U-um, that…”
“Yes?”
Kyousuke pulled his Blood-Sign from his back, placed the knife blade a few centimeters from the front, and pressed down with his body weight. After a dull popping sound, the entire tip came off.

A piece of wood as soft as cork rolled along the floor. They were generally made from valuable sacred trees, but something of that level could be grown in a greenhouse if one knew how.
“That Repliglass Blood-Sign…i-it’s for practice, n-not combat, right? Um, they use them in Government, don’t they?”
“I think it’s officially known as a Quad Motors Phosphorus. It’s for beginners, so it doesn’t have any outstanding features yet is still better than average overall. Adding my own customizations on top of it is the most effective method. Plus, a custom-made one using rare materials is a lot harder to replace if it gets damaged.”
Kyousuke answered her while carving off the bits of the tip still stuck to the Blood-Sign. Then he used the instant glue to attach a new piece of wood. He traced the blade across the side of the Blood-Sign to get rid of the glue that oozed out and the wood that stuck out too far.
Just seeing his practiced motions was enough to give Higan the general idea that he had been doing this for a long time.
Then Lu Niang Lan spoke up while operating the laptop.
“Oh, there we go, there we go. Found it. This looks fishy to me.”
“You found something, Lu-san?” asked Kyousuke while rounding off the surface of the newly-attached tip with the fine sandpaper.
The China dress beauty removed the laptop screen and held it out toward him. He took it and Higan peered in from the side.
“U-um, is this…an occult site?”
“It’s a collection of urban legends,” said Lu Niang Lan. “You can’t take these things too lightly.”
Higan did not seem to know how to respond and Kyousuke asked a question.
“Do you not use the internet much?”
“Well…my sister told me this is what, um, stole our god’s place in the world.”
Higan may not have been entirely wrong there.
“Isn’t it more accurate to say people assumed gods could appear in or descend to our world whenever they wanted, but it turned out the conditions and locations were quite limited?”
Shiroyama Kyousuke and his fellow summoners used an Incense Grenade to create an Artificial Sacred Ground before performing the summoning ceremony. That implied the existence of natural sacred grounds that did not require the “artificial” clarifier.
They could be unexplored regions like deep valleys or thick rainforests and they could be temples, sanctuaries, or cathedrals designed by human hands. It had to be more than someplace hidden from human eyes where people were forbidden to enter. They had to naturally fill people with a desire to stay out. Someone could easily peek inside one if they could, but they would never think to do so. People would decide they would be happier not

knowing if the alternative was exploring somewhere like that. It was in those places the gods would appear.
“Well, the internet is certainly convenient, but being too convenient can be a problem,” said Lu Niang Lan. “You can easily search for satellite photos and you can freely explore 3D models of the pyramids. That’ll have really limited the number of beds the gods like so much.”
“Although if they’re really one of the mystical locations spoken of in our field, people will avoid digitizing them or viewing that data even if they have the technical capabilities,” said Kyousuke. “What really happened is we revealed just how few true sacred grounds there were in the first place.”
“There are a fair number of partial ones, but in those, the *exit* gets clogged up and it turns into a haunted spot. Although if monsters like the Kuchisake-Onna show up, that gives us more work to do.”
People no longer feared the darkness.
Or rather, they had forgotten the darkness existed.
That was a dry fact, but it meant they had no choice but to use whatever was available to them.
“Summoners and vessels aren’t perceived properly by normal people and you can even trick cameras and sensors in some situations,” said the modified China dress beauty. “But that will sometimes leave behind incomplete witness data.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke scrolled through the page and saw a list of various rumors.
There was supposedly a giant server for an online casino below the amusement park and anyone would be able to add in some malware if they located it. There was supposedly a human trafficking organization walking boldly through the crowds by mixing in with the official costumed characters. Like that, most of the rumors were the standard fare.
But he frowned when he saw one of them.
~The Carnivore Girl~
In an accident at Block Z’s zoo, a girl fell into the lion’s cage. She died and the lion was shot by the zookeeper, but she continues to wander this world in search of the person who pushed her in so she can feed them to the lion’s ghost.”
“Um, isn’t this talking about Aika? She generally holes up in her apartment, but she apparently goes out late at night to go for walks or bathe in the moonlight with that wild animal of hers.”
“I really wish she would stop calling herself a shut-in when she can go to the convenience store on her own. But you understand now, don’t you? Summoners and vessels aren’t properly perceived by normal people, but they can’t control how that perception shifts out of place. That’s why partial information like that will pop up from time to time.”
Lu Niang Lan tapped at one point on the screen and the text enlarged.

“But this is different. Someone’s been spreading information for damage control. And on a pretty large scale. This is on the level of the Cyber Force’s high-speed parallel servers.”
“??? Um, uh, wh-what do you mean?”
The modified China dress beauty smiled and answered Meinokawa Higan’s question.
“It means there’s a rumor containing some kind of dangerous truth that warrants this. Not that just anyone could tell by looking at this screen☆”
Lu Niang Lan belonged to Illegal, which was (according to Government Middleman Aika) a collection of criminal organizations. That was why she could acquire anything one might need. And that included the software or specialized groups needed to accurately analyze the “flow of data” on the internet that could not be fully grasped even by a company worth billions of yen that managed both the advertisement and search business.
“When Illegal is manipulating stock prices or dabbling in the kind of land speculation that doesn’t require any violence, then we’ll purposefully spread rumors online like this. But this one has nothing to do with us. And yet it has a very Illegal smell to it. Guard of Honor might be doing something while making it look like our doing.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke and Meinokawa Higan looked to the screen again and read the rumor in question.
~Terror of the Part-Time Empire~
Toy Dream 35 is a city of adults’ hopes and children’s dreams, but it is apparently putting a lot of effort into training its part-timers. If a part-timer treats a guest poorly and ruins the dream, their superiors will take them away. Recently, a black-haired girl in a shrine maiden outfit was seen being chased by men in work uniforms.”
“U-um, is this, um…”
Higan grew flustered and Kyousuke spoke for her.
“This is a city of costumes, so the shrine maiden outfit alone isn’t a sure thing. But since it matches your sister’s description, I think it’s worth pursuing.”
“By the way, this rumor has been blocked three times in just the past few hours. That is, from eleven at night to one in the morning. Where the ‘shrine maiden part-timer girl’ appears has been all over the place, though.”
“Wait. You mean…?”
“Yes, she’s being seen more often. Almost as if she’s purposefully making appearances.”
“Hm,” said Kyousuke as he stopped to think for a moment.
He did not know what route she was using, but Meinokawa Renge had apparently safely escaped the harbor area and was traveling between blocks. She should have been able to hide if she had a secret route like that, but she was purposefully showing herself from time to time.
If Guard of Honor was trying to block the information, then the information on her location was reaching them each time she appeared.

Why would she do something so dangerous?
After some thought, Kyousuke looked over at Higan who was staring at the laptop screen.
“Eh? Eh? Um, do you need something?”
“No,” was all he said.
Meinokawa Renge was putting herself in danger to draw Guard of Honor’s attention toward her and away from her sister Higan.
“Lu-san, I get that Meinokawa Renge is purposefully letting people see her, but is there a pattern to where and when she shows up? To put it more bluntly, where will she show up next?”
“Eight next morning in Block G.”
“Eh? Wait… Um, how do you know that?”
“Well, I’ll admit three data points is too little information to say for sure, but this city has twenty-six blocks from A to Z. If you convert the letters to number, compare them to her past appearances, and do a biiit of calculation, a simple pattern shows itself.”
“Material is summoned by spelling out the name with the Blood-Sign… I guess that *is* a summoner-esque dying message.”
Kyousuke tapped at the edge of the flat screen where the time and date were displayed.
“It would be difficult to get to the current point from here, so we’ll just have to wait until eight in the morning.”
“With that much time, the odds are good Guard of Honor will notice the pattern too.”
“U-um, uh, what does that mean?”
Higan was almost in tears and Kyousuke gave a simple answer.
“It’ll be a race to reach her first, like a game of beach flags.”

Part 8

They had the necessary equipment and they had some information to base their next move on.
Just as Shiroyama Kyousuke prepared to leave the store, Lu Niang Lan called out to him while leaning on the counter.
“Oh, right. Kyousuke-chan, why not take a side arm with you?”
“I think I’d be better off without one. It seems I’m Alice (with) Rabbit, after all.”

With that quick response, he stepped out the door. Meinokawa Higan seemed puzzled by that exchange but started to follow Kyousuke while worrying about the short skirt of her maid outfit.
“That’s fine. Higan-chan, take this just in case. Don’t let Kyousuke-chan know, though.”
She placed a military knife with a twenty centimeter blade on the counter. It was the kind with a jagged back often seen in movies. However, the grip was strange. It did not hold the blade equally on both sides. One side was longer.
“That’s a trick knife that also works as a gun. It has two shots inside. When firing, align the tip with the center line of your target’s body and press the button on the grip. But assume you can’t hit from more than ten meters away. It’s essentially a replacement for a blade that’s fired by a spring.”
“Eh? Eh? Wait, um…!?”
Higan was confused. She belonged to the world of the insane fights to the death known as summoning ceremonies, but the term “gun” filled her with an entirely different sense of rejection. It was strange, but a part of her still saw herself as existing within this country’s laws.
Her mind subconsciously searched for an excuse to not take it.
“Um, uh, I thought normal weapons didn’t work on a summoner inside the Material’s protective circle.”
“That’s true. But let me tell you something that I’ve already accepted.”
“?”
“Long ago, I killed a summoner with this. At the time, they were Government Award 1000.”
That was enough to shock Higan.
Not only a summoner, but a Thousand Eater who held the greatest power of one of the three groups. Their affiliation would supposedly shift from this world to the other world and they would create new legends as a resident of *the other side*. Higan and her sister could never hope to defeat someone like that at their best, but this woman had killed them with nothing more than a modified handgun?
The modified China dress beauty laughed.
“To be blunt, I was forced to be their vessel. It was pretty awful. I really was living in a cage with a collar around my neck. I was sick of that life, so at the very, very end, I saw an opening, killed them, and ran off.”
Lu Niang Lan belonged to Illegal.
According to Government, that was a collection of criminal organizations.
“That’s why I don’t believe in the assumption that only summoners can kill summoners. You’ll find plenty of opportunities depending on the methods you’re using. I may be an exception known as the Perfect Dragon, but that isn’t something only I can do. It’s best to be on your guard.”
“…”
“Especially with high Award summoners like Kyousuke-kun, you’ll often find yourself relying on him no matter what. So you take that. You aren’t a

customer or a guest anymore; you're half of Alice (with) Rabbit. You need to compensate for the things he can't do."
The woman gave a thin smile.
Meinokawa Higan thought she had a point, but her hand still wandered hesitantly through the air.
"And there's also the circumstances for tonight in particular. You might find yourself in need of some simple self-defense."
"?"
"Kyousuke-chan lives alone in a cruiser, but where do you think you're going to end up sleeping tonight? And with nothing underneath that miniskirt maid outfit, no less."
Higan grabbed the trick knife so quickly she nearly set it off right there.

Part 9

Toy Dream 35 was a metropolis bordering the ocean. Its nightscape encroached on the dark sea as well as the land. This was due to the many ships. The small ones were boats meant to transport personnel and equipment or cruisers used as villas. The large ones were tankers and luxury cruise ships that could circumnavigate the globe.
One of the ships was especially large.
It was the Princess Azalea.
It was said the capacity of a CD had been decided because it could hold the entirety of one of Beethoven's symphonies, but something similar could be said about this cruise ship. The bridges of major port cities around the world – New York, Shanghai, Sydney, Copenhagen, Kobe, Singapore, etc. – had been modified so this ship could just barely pass through. It had begun operation ten years before to celebrate the high society debut of a single mysterious girl, but it was well known that even the water gates of the Panama Canal had been widened for the appearance of the ship.
That legend summed up the influence of the world-famous American defense contractor Quad Motors.
However…
"Milady," said the gentle voice of an old butler.
Azalea Magentarain sat next to a convenience store trashcan munching on Whitefish Night's Fried Fish, a popular hot snack. With the exception of the character illustration on the cardboard packaging, there was no creativity whatsoever in the product. If the maids waiting back on the cruise ship had seen this, they might have fainted.

“If you are hungry, shouldn’t we return to the ship?”
“No, thanks. Everyone’s too strict there.”
She tossed the cardboard packaging in the plastic bag and pulled out a cheap spring roll instead.
“Seventy-eight yen each and made with entirely unknown ingredients. No lengthy menu and no bragging chef. Ahh, now this is the ultimate thrill. I could never eat something like this back home.”
“You are incorrigible, milady.”
“Just to make sure, you are going to keep this a secret, aren’t you? If my family found out about this, they’d punish me with a detailed medical examination that very day,” said Azalea as her small tongue licked up the grease on her thumb. “Any word on Freedom Award 902?”
“I apologize. We are putting in every possible effort to gather information, but…”
“Well, yelling at you isn’t going to make them appear.”
Even the old butler’s eyes sharpened when he saw Azalea’s slender hand reach for the plastic bottle of soda sitting directly on the ground, but Azalea was clearly enjoying that reaction as she gulped down the drink.
“Rather than chasing after them, we should chase after what they want. I received a report on Meinokawa Higan when she was brought under Government’s protection.”
“It seems Guard of Honor is also taking action concerning them…”
“Then this is business as usual. Either way, a summoner can’t reveal their true value without beginning a battle. As I defeat enemy after enemy after enemy after enemy after enemy, I’ll come across Alice (with) Rabbit eventually.”
She held the fizzing bottle up in front of her eyes and pictured an imaginary image inside the translucent liquid.
“Doesn’t that seem like the first worthwhile target in a while?”
She desired a powerful target, but she gave no real thought to the target itself.
There was something else that excited her.
“The peak of the Unexplored-class…the White Queen. It’s been so long since I came across a delicious target that won’t *be crushed* before I can summon her.”
Beyond the Regulation-class and Divine-class was the Unexplored-class.
A certain Material was said to be the most powerful of that class and thus her popularity approached the level of worship.
She was known as the White Queen.
As the summoners of Government, Illegal, and Freedom honed their skills to crush each other, they had ironically cast aside the Three at the peaks of the low, middle, and high sounds and instead named her the most powerful.
When it came down to it, a battle was not a one-on-one affair to Azalea.
It was a stage on which she alone would shine.

And the most wonderful performance of all was to dance with the beautiful White Queen.
That inhuman beauty would complete that one-night-only performance in a way that could never be captured by a painting or sculpture. That was Golden Luxury's reason for existing in this world.
"Really, that is your biggest bad habit."
"Call it the true essence of the summoning ceremony. It's obvious why our combat-focused techniques can summon the gods and the Unexplored-class beyond them: combat is beautiful enough to draw them to us. Isn't that right?"
That was why she spent so much money and used so many personnel and yet never left the conclusion to her subordinates. In a game of chess, she would have been the king, but she would charge right into the enemy lines. It was all to stage the most beautiful battle.
No matter how much risk it entailed, she would choose to stand before an enemy powerful enough to rival her.
"I am truly, truly hoping you can last long enough for me to reach the White Queen, Alice (with) Rabbit."

Part 10

The next morning arrived.
"……"
"Why aren't you sleeping? And after I let you have the bed, too."
Shiroyama Kyousuke had tried to get what sleep he could by placing the kitchen table's chairs next to each other. He asked his question while cracking his back, but Meinokawa Higan did not answer him.
She was filling her cupped hands with tap water and washing her face that still looked discouraged. On a cruiser, fresh water was fairly valuable. Basically, mineral water was pumped into a tank. Although there were reports saying Toy Dream 35's tap water taken from a Repliglass bacteria pool was of higher quality than commercial water bottles.
"Next up is our 'Trend Catcher!!' section where we discuss cutting-edge technology and the latest products. Today, we will be discussing the Logical Cables everyone has been talking about lately. Have any of you ever had trouble with your electric cords getting all tangled up at home? But prepare to be amazed! These Logical Cables will untangle themselves even if they're as tangled as an afro!!"

“But Tomcat-chan, aren’t these made from Repliglass!? That was originally a military product, so surely it has to be expensive. …Huh? It’s this cheap???”
(Honestly, that stuff is showing up everywhere these days.)
Kyousuke listened to the cat costume and the female announcer (he could not remember her nickname) on the TV as he poured cereal and milk into two large bowls and prepared a salad from the ingredients in the fridge.
“We have at most two more days. After eating this, let’s pursue that rumor about the ‘part-time girl’ that’s probably your sister.”
“R-right. We need to find her as soon as we can.”
Higan clenched her small fists.
“And you need rice and miso soup for a proper breakfast.”
“Yeah, well cereal and damp bread is all I’ve got.”
“B-but I didn’t expect a legendary summoner to, um, buy Tomcat-chan cereal.”
“This is Toy Dream 35. Everything from toilet paper to molester-repellent spray is branded with some kind of character or another. It’s harder to find something without an illustration on it.”
To add some more flavor, Kyousuke put a single scoop of plain yogurt in his bowl.
“I-I see…”
“Why are you so on edge? None of this is genetically modified if that’s what you’re worried about.”
“Our shrine performs doll funerals, so I don’t really like seeing all these mass-produced character goods that just get thrown out. Nothing’s scarier than a smile buried in mud…”
While Higan preferred Japanese food, her empty stomach won out and she stuck a silver spoon into her large bowl of cereal.
Before taking the first bite, she muttered something under her breath.
“Oh, White Queen. Thank you for the happiness of having food at the table for another day.”
“You’re praying again?”
“I-I’m a shrine maiden, so of course I am. Didn’t I tell you the White Queen is our shrine’s unofficial second god?”
“I understand wanting to rely on her when she’s known as the strongest, but you should be focusing on the entire summoning ceremony system more than a single temporary Material.”
“B-but…”
Higan took a bite of the cereal and then reached for the bottle of honey on the table.
“The name on this boat’s side is the White Queen.”
“And you have no idea how much I regret that. If I’d known how hard it is to change a boat’s name once it’s been registered, I never would have given it that name.”

Higan was puzzled by the way he seemed to spit out the words, but he changed the subject before she could find an answer.
“Oh, right. We need to do something about ‘that’ once you finish eating.”
“?”
“I’m talking about that.”
Kyousuke used his spoon to point toward the floor where the seawater-soaked shrine maiden outfit was soaking in a tub of water.

Toy Dream 35 was a giant amusement park filled with hopes and dreams, but it of course had the stores needed for daily life in addition to the souvenir shops and official fashion shops.
But Meinokawa Higan spoke up as soon as they entered the laundromat they found on the way to the nearest station.
“Oh, um, we can’t use this.”
“…Why not?”
She was looking at the synthetic detergent, not the washing machine.
“My sister said our outfits are dyed using the rubia plant, so u-using something like this will, um, wash the color out.”
“Then what kind of detergent can we use?”
“I think everything *like this* is off limits.”
Kyousuke held his head in his hands.
It was looking like they could not use the laundromat.
“So let me get this straight. To wash this thing, we have to use expensive dry cleaning? In this city that prices everything at hotel levels?”
“I…guess so.”
“And with the special hand-washing option needed for a kimono or dress!?”
“It would be, um, m-meaningless otherwise.”
“That costs too much. ……I guess we’ll have to give up on that.”
“?”
Meinokawa Higan blankly tilted her head and he gave what might as well have been a death sentence to a girl who was still wearing a miniskirt maid outfit.
“On buying you some panties.”

Ten minutes later, Shiroyama Kyousuke held the receipt from the dry cleaners they had dropped the shrine maiden outfit off at as soon as it had opened.
He had also been hit over and over by Meinokawa Higan whose entire face was beet red.
“Wh-why!? Um, how could this have happened!?”
“One: I got some Incense Grenades and information at Lu-san’s place. That’s an Illegal business, so it isn’t cheap. Two: this is an amusement park

city, so pretty much everything is expensive. Three: hand-washing traditional Japanese clothing requires an expert, so it's super expensive!! Just to be clear, my savings are pretty much down to zero now. Zero! Once my fridge is empty, I'm going to have to catch some dinner with a fishing rod!"
"B-but I thought you were Freedom Award 902, Alice (with) Rabbit!!"
"I've been using up all of my savings without doing any work for about half a year now. Got a problem with that? Besides, before taking issue with my financial situation, how about you take a look in your own wallet!?"
"Uuh… B-but we had our shrine taken away because of our debt…"
"Um… Just out of curiosity, how did you and your sister even get to Toy Dream 35? Surely you have some spare clothes at the hotel or apartment you were staying at."
"……We don't have anything like that."
"Don't tell me you were living in a home of newspaper and cardboard… That's just sad."
"S-say a word more and, um, I might not be able to control myself."
Nevertheless, they could not spend money they did not have and she could not wear panties she did not have.
She nearly accepted her fate, but then something occurred to her.
"Huh? There is a way!! Y-you can sell that cruiser!"
"Hell no!! Surely you don't think I'm crazy enough to sell my home to buy some panties!"
And thus Meinokawa Higan was forced to continue her strategy of utter defenselessness.
"Once this is over, you should probably go running to Government or Illegal and accept a few small jobs. At this rate, you'll be digging through the trash for food."
"U-uuh… D-do you have to, um, verbally attack me like that?"
"Yes, I do! We're supposed to be a pair, but I feel like one side isn't exactly supporting the other much!"

Part 11

It was 7:58 in front of Block G's monorail station. The city's ground had been intentionally submerged and all of the roads floated in the air like elevated highways or giant land bridges. The plaza in front of the monorail station was large enough for a basketball court, but it too was not solid land.

At this time, the people on the way to work or school were mixed in with the tourists who had gotten up early. But that area in front of peaceful Block G's monorail station was also a delicate "powder keg" where multiple summoners were prepared to clash head-on.
"I-it's about time…isn't it?" asked Meinokawa Higan while holding down her maid outfit's short skirt with both hands.
She was standing out more due to her fidgeting than her clothing, but Kyousuke held his tongue because he knew telling her that would not help.
"B-but how is, um, my sister moving around? I-I was found by Government right away."
"She's probably using the staff-only pathways," calmly answered Kyousuke. "There are apparently tons of passageways spread out through the city like a spider web to quickly transport supplies, trash, and famous people who might cause a scene if they were in the public eye. Some are undersea tunnels, some run through the giant land bridges, and so on. I don't know all the details myself, but it's the hidden side of this land of dreams."
But Renge had used those to survive until morning.
Although no one knew how long that would last.
"Assuming Guard of Honor isn't filled with complete idiots, they'll be hiding around here somewhere. …Your sister Renge and the people pursuing her are both here somewhere, so focus."
The target was a human being and lives were on the line.
The ultimate game of beach flags would soon begin.

Meinokawa Renge had long black hair and smooth white skin, so no one could have looked more at home in a shrine maiden outfit. She was near the plaza in front of Block G's monorail station, but she was actually on a different land bridge passing directly above that plaza. She was extremely close, but she would never cross paths with Kyousuke or Higan.
A weird costumed character that kept saying "gozaru" cheerfully passed her by.
She had an extremely simple reason for being here.
She was intentionally following a pattern to capture Guard of Honor's attention. That would allow Higan at least to escape their information network.
(It scares me that my connection with her was severed, but I can't go searching for her now. If I chase after her, I might lead Guard of Honor right to her. I can only trust that she's alive and keep doing what I'm doing!!)
She would do anything for her sister.
Their opponent was skilled and this cheap attempt to remain on the run would not last forever, so she wanted to be of some use instead of dying a worthless death. She wanted to protect her family.
She had resolved herself to that, and yet…

(Why is Higan here!?)
Renge crouched behind the concrete railing to make sure she could not be seen from below.
This defeated the entire purpose of her acting as bait. Guard of Honor would soon close in on Renge, but Higan was here too.
Plus…
(And why is she wearing a miniskirt maid outfit???)
That question only brought further questions.
(Plus, who is that boy standing next to her? Eh? Don't tell me that's…a new summoner!? Is that why her connection with me was severed? But a contract can't be forced through threats or hypnotism, so, um…)
Those questions brought further confusion.
(Absolute consent is needed. But that means he could have deceived her like a host chatting up women in a host club… D-don't tell me that bastard laid his hands on my cute little Higan!!)
She nearly forgot her situation as anger flared up inside her.
"Found you☆"
But then she heard the sound of creaking metal.
The wave of pedestrians naturally opened on either side to avoid "her".
It was a young woman wearing a light pink nurse outfit. However, her fingernails were painted a venomous color and a single tuft of her long, loose hair was dyed deep red. Both were unhygienic things an actual nurse would never do.
However, the entire city of Toy Dream 35 was an amusement park, so a costume was not going to gather much attention. The attention was drawn by something else.
The sound of creaking metal continued.
One of her hands held an IV stand with wheels. The transparent tube led to a girl in a plain, long-sleeved navy blue sailor uniform. The skirt was long and the legs poking out were covered in black tights. But very few people would think of the words "delicate" or "slender" upon seeing her. The words in their mind would be far more frail, devastating, and hopeless. They would be similar to the thoughts of someone seeing an old tree that had started to rot from within.
The girl swayed unsteadily on her feet as if she did not even have the willpower to remain standing. If some third party followed the nursing instructions and supported her back while tugging gently on her hand, she would probably have followed them to the ends of the earth.
They were a summoner and vessel.
The summoner went by Guard of Honor's shared name of Uniquely Selfless. She was the skilled summoner who had summoned the Unexplored-class Lady of "Purple Lightning" that Separates Good from Evil (iu – ao – eu – ei – kub – miq – a – ci – pl) on a cruiser at the harbor. …However, she had used up more than fifty vessels to reach this point.

The vessel's head continued lolling unsteadily and she did not speak a word, but that was hardly surprising when the drug in the IV kept her mind muddy twenty-four hours a day. The nameless girl probably had no idea she was a vessel.
The effect was technically somewhat different, but it may have been similar to pharmaceutically recreating the hopeless trance that left someone only able to smile a little as the final calamity of defeat approached. But here, it continued indefinitely.
"Meinokawa Renge sighted☆ And if she's been sighted, then I'm close enough to use this☆☆☆"
The Uniquely Selfless in the nurse uniform grinned and let her slender fingers crawl along her own thigh.
She pulled a metal can from her skirt.
It was an Incense Grenade.
Summoner Meinokawa Renge did not currently have the vessel needed to summon Material, so she would be killed by even the weakest Material at a cost of one.
The enemy summoner licked her lips that were covered in an excessive amount of lipstick and she pulled the IV needle from the girl's arm. That was another sign of the coming battle. In her long life, the vessel only had any awareness during the few minutes of a battle. To that ignorant girl, that life may have seemed like a fragment of a psychedelic nightmare.
"Hee hee☆ Ahh, I knewwww it☆ This moment when I hold a human life in my hands☆☆☆ This is the moment of ultimate bliss☆ Ha ha ha☆ Ah ha☆ Ha ha☆☆ Ah ha ha ha☆ Ah ha☆☆☆ Ah ha☆☆ Ah ha ha☆ Ah ha ha ha☆☆☆☆ Ah ha☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆"
But then she heard a girl's voice as clear as a bell slip into her ears from behind.
"Oh? If you really want to take your cruelty to the next level, you need to create some benefit to society so its value will be widely accepted, don't you think? …For example, like this."
A rumbling burst out.
It was over in less than fifteen seconds.

Part 12

Shiroyama Kyousuke heard the whistling of something slicing through the air as it slowly rotated. The people in the plaza had started screaming and

fleeing in confusion after an explosion directly above, but that quieter noise sounded oddly loud to his ears and heart.
Meinokawa Higan looked up without thinking.
At that exact moment, a woman in a nurse outfit fell from the giant land bridge crossing above the plaza.
A dull, soft sound followed.
Despite falling solidly onto her back, the woman forgot to choke and continued making a single action. She was not holding a Blood-Sign, but she slowly continued miming the act of striking something with one again and again.
“Kh!!”
Kyousuke took Higan’s hand and began to run.
He nearly leaped forward to hide below the land bridge running by overhead.
Higan looked like she was going to ask a question, so he covered her mouth with a hand and held his breath.
He heard a pure girl’s voice. In fact, it was so pure it sounded like it would kill germs.
The speaker was likely looking down at the plaza from above. And from the sound of her voice, she was speaking over a cellphone or radio.
“Yes, yes. I defeated them. It was Guard of Honor’s…well, it’s a little confusing since they’re all called Uniquely Selfless. Anyway, this is the eighth one. It’s so easy I’m having trouble holding back a yawn.”
(That voice. Government Award 930, Golden Luxury!?)
Shiroyama Kyousuke gulped with his hand still covering Meinokawa Higan’s mouth.
The timing could not have been worse.
Like the ally of justice Government was meant to be, they must have used their own information network to hunt down Guard of Honor. But the enemy of your enemy was not necessarily your friend. Kyousuke and Higan had already given Azalea Magentarain a reason to fight them.
Meinokawa Renge was nearby.
And Guard of Honor may have sent more than the one summoner.
If Golden Luxury noticed them while speaking on the phone, she would probably use a Material even in this crowd. Who could say how far the damage would spread.
“I’ll leave it to you to pick up the trash. How about putting her through a strength test to see how far you have to go before she tells you everything?”
Whatever the case, they could not afford to begin a battle here. Meeting up with Meinokawa Renge came first and then they needed to focus on safely leaving this place.
“Is this necessary? Of course it is. I am Government Award 930. Are you sure you haven’t misjudged my value?”
“(M-my sister was there…)”
In his arms, Maid Higan looked up at Kyousuke and pleaded quietly to him.

It was an earnest plea.
“(When I looked up before, I saw my sister there! We have to do something!!)”
“(Wait. …Something isn’t right.)”
Kyousuke felt a scorching sensation on the back of his neck as Azalea continued speaking overhead.
“You all have talent that rookies do not, but there is too much variation in that talent and not everyone is going to earn a passing grade. Don’t you think we need to weed the failures out at some point? With a large plan, even the smallest mistake could lead to it all falling apart.”
He had assumed Golden Luxury was speaking with a Government contact, but she was not.
“If they can keep me from catching up to them, we know other members of Government can’t catch up to them either. We are in the process of carrying out a delicate plan, so they need to be able to accomplish at least that much. Anyone caught by my network would be caught and tortured by other members of Government. You should thank me that they were only caught *in this practice run*. If this was a real fight to the death, those incompetent grunts would have been defeated, thrown in a dark room, and tortured for every detail of our plan.”
Azalea Magentarain was speaking with someone else entirely.

Part 13

With a cellphone in hand, someone walked past the workers inspecting and restoring the destroyed harbor area. It did not matter that the area was open only to authorized personnel. By the time the workers tried to warn them, those normal people had already unnaturally forgotten this person even existed.
That did not matter to this person.
They had lost the concept of individuality even more than when they had gone by the name Uniquely Selfless.
However, this person spoke quietly.
“The organization has changed quite a bit since you arrived.”
“Oh? I have no interest in talk of hierarchy or the new and the old. We are equally Uniquely Selfless, after all.”
“I see. So I’m supposed to take consolation in the fact that you have changed as well? You are definitely not a queen.”

The person gave an emotionless laugh with no hint of enjoyment in their face.
“As you said, Guard of Honor needs to weed out the weaker elements that could trip up the organization as a whole. And a top member of Government, the world police who know quite well *how official pursuit is carried out*, would be perfect for that job. But you haven’t forgotten about pursuing the escapees, have you? That too is of utmost important.”
“Yes, yes. I have already restrained Meinokawa Renge. I had to be very careful to make sure I didn’t kill her in one blow, though.”
The summoners did not bother hiding their voices.
They and everything they said would be erased from the people’s memories before long anyway.

Part 14

“Did you take me for the kind of fool that loses sight of her primary task while taking a detour? She’s lying handcuffed on the ground, so come collect her.”
“(They were…connected?)”
Kyousuke frowned.
From there, his expression grew more and more serious.
“(No, that isn’t it. …Doesn’t this mean Golden Luxury changed her nickname to Uniquely Selfless quite a while ago!?)”
“Now.”
The girl’s voice suddenly stabbed into his ears.
But this time it was clearly directed toward him.
“If we are willing to attack our own to secure our safety, did you really think we would let a wild rabbit like you escape, Freedom Award 902, Alice (with) Rabbit!?”
(Why would she throw away her current position to join Guard of Honor? No, I don’t have time to be questioning this now!!)
He clicked his tongue, released Higan from his arms, and spoke.
“We can’t hide any longer. Higan, are you prepared to work with me? We need to defeat Government Award 930…no, Guard of Honor’s Uniquely Selfless!!”
“O-okay!!”
The blonde girl and her aged butler dropped down from the sky.
Shiroyama Kyousuke raced forward like a bullet in the instant they landed and absorbed the shock with their knees. He pulled the long Blood-Sign

from his back, extended it, and thrust the tip toward the center of the girl's neck that seemed more fragile than glass. This was the same as crushing someone's throat with the flat tip of a wooden sword. The full-strength strike of the military Repliglass Blood-Sign was clearly a killing technique.
A dull sound burst out.
But the girl was unharmed. The butler had calmly stepped in front of Azalea and crossed his arms to block the Blood-Sign strike.
The old man spoke to his master without the slightest change to his expression.
"Milady."
"Yes, let's get started."
A solid sound followed those words. An Incense Grenade had fallen straight to Azalea's feet and the pin remained in her hand.
"Kh!?"
Kyousuke grabbed the middle of the long Blood-Sign with both hands and used both ends to make repeated strikes from a variety of angles. He was trying to knock the Incense Grenade into the distance before it exploded, but the butler acted as a barrier and would not let any attack through. Also, Azalea poked her slender fingertip into the face of the collapsed nurse to guide her toward the boy. Before the slowly-moving figure could get in the way, Kyousuke swung the tip of his Blood-Sign near her nurse's face to send that loser walking in a different direction. Fractal Leskins's arms moved swiftly and nearly grabbed the Blood-Sign, so Kyousuke clicked his tongue and jumped back.
Only a few seconds had passed, but he had missed his final chance.
With a light bursting sound, an Artificial Sacred Ground explosively filled the area.
"We are both in the 900s."
A pink ribbon wrapped in a large reel whipped through empty space and became a 150 cm rod. The girl known as a golden bird of prey grabbed the Blood-Sign from the air with one hand and gave a fierce smile.
"Truly high-quality fruits are most delicious when eaten without any kind of preparation, don't you think? I have set this rare stage, so don't try anything crass and let me enjoy this."
The effect would only last ten minutes.
The gate to true hell had opened for one-sixth of an hour.

Part 15

As soon as the two of them clashed, the giant land bridge directly above the plaza crumbled. The summoners had their protective circles, so mere rubble was not going to kill them. The dust was simply meant to block Kyousuke's view and prevent him from using his Blood-Sign.
Meanwhile, Golden Luxury took action.
"Un."
Her voice ruled the battlefield.
"Deux."
Like a Buddhist priest's bell, the mere sound seemed to drive out evil.
"Trois."
It was a pure voice.
It was frightening.
Meinokawa Higan had become the Original Red (b), which cost one low sound. It was a three meter tall mass of red sticky liquid. The girl's thoughts had nearly ground to a halt when she saw the reality that accompanied that adorable voice.
"Un, deux, trois."
Azalea Magentarain's actions were simple.
She merely used her Blood-Sign to launch all three of her initial white spheres of light known as White Thorns.
But she was very accurate. Almost too accurate.
"Un, deux, trois. Un, deux, trois. …Un, deux, trois."
Looking just at their paths, they drew a large rectangle that spanned the Artificial Sacred Ground. The White Thorns she had launched returned accurately to herself. They came to a stop with a slight spin and her Blood-Sign would sharply strike them once more.
As a result…
<She's…not using up her White Thorns!? She's endlessly hitting the White Thorns that come back to, um, remain on the attack indefinitely without having to worry about her remaining stock!?>

As a vessel, Higan had become one with the Material that had both an inhumanly large body and a bizarrely artistic appearance, but her heart was filled with very human fear.
A dance of crimson light exploded in that tiny world along with a broken song that destroyed the psyche of all who heard it and that sounded like someone banging their hands on a piano's keys. The dance and song continued endlessly without any kind of break.
White Thorns that came to a stop would naturally vanish.
But if they were hit by the Blood-Sign again within the three seconds before they vanished, they could be reused. Some summoners tried running around the large Artificial Sacred Ground to reach the White Thorn's stopping point before it arrived.
<But th-that doesn't always work. Th-they only go for the ones they think they can actually reach. But, um, th-this person is doing it with 100% accuracy!?>
Even as the number of White Thorns grew, her accuracy did not change.
All the while, her additional stock was being replenished every ten seconds.
The White Thorns did not just strike the walls and floor.
They also hit the Petals that carved out the names of Material with the low, middle, and high sounds as consonants and lowest sounds as vowels.
Whenever the Petals collided with each other or fell into a Spot, they produced a crazed rhythm with their respective sounds, further escalating the broken song.
<With this…like this…w-we can never catch up by, um, hitting individual Petals into the Spots with individual White Thorns like normal! She's way too fast!!>
Higan's focus turned to her summoner partner.
It may have been a form of escapism to reject the dizzying fear before her eyes.
Needless to say, Shiroyama Kyousuke had not been sitting idly by as all this happened.
He was constantly making the quickest and shortest movements to hit the White Thorns and knock various Petals into the Spots. Sometimes he knocked two or three Petals in at once. As a vessel, Meinokawa Higan could only watch the summoner's skill and she was truly impressed.
She became a giant umbrella with fangs covering the outer edge while the old butler became a goddess statue filled with murderous gimmicks. There was a great serpent made of several chains, an automaton created by sewing together human skin, an old tome covered in countless eyeballs, a gear with a giant smile plastered on the side, and a dinosaur not found in any encyclopedia. Both sides' Materials were changing in the blink of an eye.
But they could not catch up.

Kyousuke was controlling a single White Thorn at a time, so he was not standing in the same realm of speed as Azalea who constantly controlled several White Thorns as if juggling them.
“!!”
“Oh, dear. What seems to be the matter? Where has the supposedly imperturbable Alice (with) Rabbit gone?”
When it came down to it, the summoning ceremony was a battle between Materials.
Their strength was determined by the sound range and by the cost, aka the number of Petals hit into the Spots.
Both of those factors came down to how well the White Thorns were manipulated by the Blood-Sign.
If one was accurate yet took time to hit the Petals, they might be overwhelmed by pure numbers.
If one hit a lot of Petals but had poor aim, they might be outdone by accurate and efficient movements.
But how was one to face an opponent who had both strengths and cast aside both weaknesses?
Was there even a way of doing that?

The girl smiled thinly while accurately controlling well over ten White Thorns with just the one Blood-Sign.
“Once you hear someone ask for ‘help’, you will end up saving everything and everyone, as if a switch has been thrown. You do not keep a single vessel and instead make a contract with someone you come across who possesses the necessary qualities before releasing them to the sunny side of the world. …The flaw in your insistence on saving everyone you lay eyes on is not that your results do not live up to that ideal. In fact, the problem is that you are too perfect, isn’t it?”
“Kh.”
“Yes, that’s right, isn’t it? Saving everything is really no different from someone who cannot clean up their room or throw anything away. So when you try to save the world, you end up saving more than necessary and end up with piles of chaos around you. Even if each individual element is desirable, as a whole, it does nothing but harm, doesn’t it?”
“You seem to know about me, but I barely know anything about you.”
They clashed at close range.
The two summoners pressed their protective circles together while glaring sharply at each other.
“You’re Government Award 930 and the daughter of Quad Motors’s president. What possible complaint could you have with the public side or the hidden side of that? I can’t imagine why you would throw all of that away to join Guard of Honor!!”
“Oh, dear. Are you serious? Do you really think the ‘normal’ way of looking at things has any bearing on our world?”
Azalea giggled, but accurately called countless White Thorns back to her.
“My position on the public stage? The number of dollar bills I own? What value does any of that have when we are immediately forgotten by earth’s entire population? If I want something, I can grab it from the store. If I don’t like someone, I can kill them in public. I can ‘normally’ accomplish those things. …*And in the same way, no one will care even if I do take things from them,*” said Azalea. “More importantly, is there any real meaning in summoner Awards? You’ve reached 902 in Freedom, so you should understand that.”
“…”
“Reaching Award 1000 reverses your affiliation between this world and the other world, so you will begin writing a new legend *on the other side*? Hah! Not likely! Some morons who might as well be amateurs will carelessly say they’re so close once they reach the 900s, but you know that isn’t going to happen, don’t you? The Awards grow much harder to earn when there are so few left. That unimaginable difficulty makes me wonder if it was intentionally made to be impossible in order to create an upper limit for summoners. But if I change sides in hopes of earning Awards, I’d be treated as a traitor in this cramped field. You’re left blocked on all sides, yet they still tell you to simply earn the rest of the Awards.”

“I knew Government Award 1000. Although they were killed by *a certain woman* before making the reversal from this world and the other world.”
“Those are only the cheaters who know how to erase all the secrets and rumors about them as they walk freely between the three major powers. In the end, the human rulers and the Three have rigged the system so only those they approve of becoming a god can reach 1000, don’t you think?”
“That person’s brutal strength was nothing as soft as that,” muttered Kyousuke under his breath.
Azalea continued with a muddy look in her eyes.
“Why does the rose symbol used for summoning use the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet instead of the standard twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet? Why is the symbolism consistent between the Rose, Petals, and White Thorns, yet the Spot is not? The logic and rules must have been constructed for someone’s convenience. There must have been someone who benefited from it. It’s wrong to think you can reach 1000 and cross that line just by following their rules.”
Even as she spat out these words, Azalea showed no sign of regret.
It was as if she truly had cast aside her position as Golden Luxury, Government’s ace.
“And on top of all that, there is no objective way to confirm where the Thousand Eaters actually end up. Is *the other side* really an otherworldly heaven? Are they even going to *the other side*? We have no idea, so it’s only natural to be hesitant to jump right in, don’t you think?”
Shiroyama Kyousuke had a bad feeling about this.
There was something decidedly bad about what Azalea was going to say.
“That is why we have searched for a more definite and simpler method of confirming that for all to see.”
She let out a soft giggle.
“So we have searched for a way of remaining eternally with the gods without relying on anything as uncertain as going to the *other side*.”
Azalea Magentarain clearly stated her conclusion.
“Yes. We were searching for the method used in the miracle that you alone once successfully created.”
“…!!!!!!”
A dull sound rang out.
It was the sound of Kyousuke gripping his primary weapon as a summoner so tightly it nearly broke.
“Hee hee. Ah ha ha ha ha ha!! Do I detect a disturbance in your strokes? We do not have your level of genius, but we have gathered the techniques we need to reach that former genius. So we no longer need a genius. Knowing that it is indeed possible by human hands is more than enough, don’t you think?”
<Wh-what?>
Even as her temporary body was incessantly torn into, Meinokawa Higan forgot her pain.

A greater question was rising within her.
<She is…no, um, you two are t-talking about *a world I'm not familiar with*. Wh-what are you two talking about?>
"You understand nothing."
Supposedly imperturbable Kyousuke spoke so fiercely it sounded like he was spitting out blood.
His eyes were not focused on the present world. He was shaken *in that world Higan was unfamiliar with.*
"There is no paradise or joy beyond 'there'. That only leads to bottomless despair!!"
"Ha ha. That's fine☆ We too wish to stand on the kind stage that lets us speak such superhuman phrases!!"
The movements of Azalea's White Thorns grew even more skillful.
Her Material changed form again and again as it attacked Meinokawa Higan.
They could not win like this.
Kyousuke directly faced that dizzying reality and also quickly searched for a way to win.
(Uniquely Selfless…the former Golden Luxury specializes in ricocheting a set number of White Thorns back toward herself to remove the quantity limit without using them up.)
"You need to summon one hundred Regulation-class to summon a Divine-class and you need to summon fifty Divine-class to summon an Unexplored-class. Honestly, doesn't that system seem so very annoying? Your average summoner is defeated before I can reach the Unexplored-class."
(She uses the floor, walls, streetlights, vending machines, and anything else inside the Artificial Sacred Ground. She also often uses the boundaries of the Artificial Sacred Ground itself.)
"That is why I have high hopes for you."
(Not all of the Materials she uses are all that large. Although I don't know if that's due to her personal tastes or because she doesn't want to destroy the terrain if she can avoid it.)
"With your level of endurance, you might just last long enough for me to reach the peak of the Unexplored-class, the 'White' Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz)!!"
Kyousuke ignored her nonsense and sucked in a quick breath while using his Blood-Sign.
The fighting spirit in his eyes grew sharper.
"In that case, can you use 'this'?"

Part 16

One level above, the shrine maiden girl named Meinokawa Renge groaned on the edge of the destroyed land bridge running above the plaza.
With a click, the handcuffs unlocked behind her back.
Unlike the locks on front doors or safes, handcuff locks were generally quite simplified. If one was used to it, they could open it with a hairpin.
“Did they really think they didn’t have to worry about me if they put these on me?” spat out Renge as she rubbed her freed wrists. “Do they watch too many movies?”
The work had taken a few minutes, but even that felt like too much.
Her one and only sister was literally having her life worn away nearby.
That was the family member Renge had tried to save even if it meant throwing away her own life.
(Dammit… They’ve been fighting a completely defensive battle for a while now.)
Renge clenched her teeth as she watched from above.
The boy paired with Higan was far from weak. In fact, he was easily a few levels more skilled a summoner than Renge. He was using the Petals up at tremendous speed. New Roses were appearing and breaking apart into Petals quite frequently. Out of the 216 Petals of a Rose, there were seven each of the consonants. If all of a consonant or all of a vowel was used up, a new Rose would appear. Renge knew that rule, but she rarely saw it in action outside of a long match created by using several chains in a row.
But even then, he could not catch up to his opponent. The girl with reddish blonde ringlet curls used an unlimited strategy with unbelievable speed. Her Material grew stronger without end, so even if Higan was far from weak, she looked weak as she was torn to shreds. Her monstrous body was frequently broken apart to the extent that Higan’s soft Silhouette could be glimpsed inside.
And on top of that…
(This is bad. Their opponent is going to reach the Divine-class soon. If that happens, the sound range won’t matter. Higan and the ground around her will be smashed to pieces!!)
Renge had heard what that girl said.
That curly-haired girl was apparently fixated on the Unexplored-class “White” Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth. With that in mind, Renge noticed something interesting when she looked across the entire Artificial Sacred Ground.
(There are two ways of summoning an Unexplored-class. The first is to summon one hundred Regulation-classes and then fifty Divine-classes to prepare the environment needed to carve out the name of the Unexplored-class.)
That was difficult to pull off. The Artificial Sacred Ground created by an Incense Grenade only lasted about ten minutes. While hitting multiple Petals at once and constantly building up a new Material every two or three seconds, it would take over seven minutes. While it was doable in a mock

battle, it was not easily achieved in a real battle where the summoner had to see through the enemy's actions and put their life on the line.
(The other is to carve out the name in order without a single letter out of place.)
That one was not easy either. The acquired Petals could not be rearranged to make the name. From beginning to end, not a single letter could be wasted and not a single letter could be replaced. Naturally, if the enemy noticed the attempt to summon an Unexplored-class and attempted to interfere, it was all over.
But…
(She's so fixated on the "White" Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth that she's preparing multiple methods of summoning her. She's working at the one hundred Regulation-classes and fifty Divine-classes, but she's also secretly preparing other patterns around the Artificial Sacred Ground so she can hit all the Petals into the Spot in order with just a slight hit from a White Thorn.)
She was setting up those rows of dominoes here and there. And no matter whose fingertip poked at them, the tiles would fall just the same.
The dominoes were not complete yet. She was simply placing the parts here and there as a side project. But if a few of those incomplete pieces were linked together, she would have the conditions needed for the summoning. Then a single White Thorn would link it all together.
(Once a century, a lucky chance comes along. It scares me that she's skilled enough to create that kind of chance herself, but she isn't the only one who can use it.)
Renge thought this provided a chance at victory.
The Guard of Honor summoner baring her fangs toward Higan would soon surpass the Regulation-class and reach the Divine-class. But if the much more powerful White Queen was summoned first, the difference in skill would no longer matter.
(Anyone can summon her now. With the materials she's set up as insurance, even I would be able to reach that peak of the Unexplored-class.)
She could tear victory from their enemy's grasp.
But what did she need to do that?
"Begin remote resonance, begin organ synchronization, receiving life signals from organs, synchronization complete."
This was not originally Meinokawa Renge's ability.
She justified it to herself because this was an emergency, but she still apologized to her sister in her heart.
"Foreign reaction detected in body linked by pseudo-resonance, viewing contract, deleting and overwriting one portion…"
A quiet creaking sound came from Renge's chest.
It was a series of ever-so-slight sounds like thin, thin wires being gradually pulled on from both ends.

“You might think you’re quite the summoner after claiming my sister for yourself.”
After the sound of rustling leaves, she held a Blood-Sign made of countless gathered charms.
A summoner could not use the summoning ceremony without a vessel.
But…
“Don’t underestimate sisterly
booooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooonds!!”

Part 17

At that moment, Shiroyama Kyousuke was aiming for a Petal using a White Thorn, but then he was overcome by the feeling of something being pulled from the center of his body. He had an abundance of experience as a summoner, but not even he had felt this before.
Something was escaping him and being stolen from him.
“Wha-…!?”
All of his White Thorns vanished and he lost his connection to Higan who had invited the Material inside herself.
“…Tch.”
Azalea Magentarain seemed to have noticed the change as she accurately controlled her Blood-Sign. But the look on her small face was not of confusion or triumph. It was irritation that her grand stage had been ruined.
Someone jumped down from the destroyed land bridge.
The shrine maiden holding a Blood-Sign was Higan’s sister Renge. When Kyousuke saw the many White Thorns floating around her, he finally grasped what was going on.
(She stole my contract between summoner and vessel!? That shouldn’t be possible. Did their blood connection as twins affect it somehow!?)
Having stolen his rights as summoner, Meinokawa Renge sharply struck a White Thorn with her Blood-Sign. As he watched the white light cut across the Artificial Sacred Ground like a shooting star, *Kyousuke felt a chill run down his spine.*
This was leading to the peak of the Unexplored-class.
This would summon the “White” Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz).
“The summoning ceremony is a technique to evenly summon any Material. It doesn’t matter if you’re the lowest rookie or the greatest veteran!! Even if

you were the one to set this up, that Unexplored-class is mine as long as I knock it into the Spot!!”
The conditions were set in place.
A moment later, a tremendous pure white light blew out from Meinokawa Higan.
It was a cocoon of birth.
The intensely bright vortex stabbed into one’s retinas even with both arms covering the face, but it suddenly vanished. Instead, countless small feathers that glowed like an angel’s scattered about like a blizzard of flower petals.
A lovely girl stood in the center of it all.
Even with twintails, her beautiful silver hair reached her waist. She had black jewel-like eyes that seemed to see through everything. Her pure white clothing resembled a wedding dress, but it was far too revealing for that. A bright light from behind would probably have been enough for every line of her body to show through. Some parts of the outfit glittered with a silver light, but they were unlikely to be crass armor that directly blocked blades or arrows. For one thing, nothing could hope to harm that glowing and glittering skin of hers.
She had no weapons.
In the many legends, that clothing would transform to match the current situation and would form billions or even trillions of weapons to slaughter her enemy. However, it was hard to say those weapons were the whole of her power. When speaking of pure destructive power, her two slender arms were the greatest of all.
She was the ultimate Material that stood at the peak of the Unexplored-class which lay beyond the Regulation-class and Divine-class.
She was the ‘White’ Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth.
Her very presence did not allow even a drop of impurity.
She was an incarnation of benevolence, a symbol of sanctity, and a personification of radiance.
(We can win…)
Meinokawa Renge held her Blood-Sign tight.
(We can win like this!! No matter how accurately and quickly she uses her Blood-Sign and even if she can freely summon Divine or Unexplored-classes, there’s nothing to be afraid of. The White Queen is the best of the best, so the battle is pretty much over once she’s been successfully summoned. Now no one can hurt Higan!!)
She was confident of her victory.
The distinctions between rookie and expert or individual and organization did not matter. When it came down to it, a battle between summoners was settled by what they could summon.
But a moment later, she saw something unbelievable.
“Wha-…?”
The sight was such a shock that she could not help but speak aloud.

Government Award 930, Golden Luxury, was now Guard of Honor's Uniquely Selfless. That girl with red-tinged blonde ringlet curls released the Material serving her. Then she and the vessel who had returned to being an old man got down on one knee and bowed their heads.
Time briefly seemed to stop.
The broken song of the summoning ceremony came to an end and absolute silence enveloped them.
Renge almost forgot they were in the midst of a deadly battle.
Those two had wished to see this great existence, even if it cost them their lives. It was an audience with a great lord.
"Oh, Your Majesty… Please forgive us for not preparing more for this audience."
Yes.
"We of Guard of Honor are doing everything in our ability to quickly construct a suitable audience chamber. That such a vulgar individual was able to summon you is but one sign of that. Please wait a while longer before we can truly invite you in from *the other side*."
They almost looked like knights kneeling before their queen.
This was not at all how one acted around the Materials that were treated like tools without wills of their own.
"What…is this?"
"Oh, no… Oh, no!! Release your Material at once. Summoning that…that thing in front of me is a terrible mistake!!"
The boy who had been with Higan was shouting something, but Renge was not listening.
The pure white queen gently smiled. Like a solid bud blooming into a lovely flower after being exposed to the breath of spring, just seeing the smile filled one's heart with happiness.
But destruction soon followed.
The old man in a suit was kicked away like a ball and the blonde girl had her bowed head stomped down to the ground.
The dull sound seemed to arrive only after a short delay.
This was of course not caused by the speed of sound.
Renge's mind had hesitated to comprehend the truth before her eyes.
"Nn…nnhh…"
As Renge watched in a daze, the White Queen raised her arms and bent a little backwards. As she did, her alluring bodylines moved seductively. It was the action of a student stretching after the boring principal's speech was finally over. Material was supposed to be an inhuman monster that could use power beyond human comprehension in the isolated Artificial Sacred Ground, but her action completely overturned that idea.
Then her pure eyes stopped on Shiroyama Kyousuke.
She ignored the girl groaning below her foot, put on a venomously refreshing smile, and greeted him.
"Long time no see, brother. Have you been doing well since I last saw you?"

She had the enchanting voice to match her sexy body, but when she called him “brother”, the tone of a little girl was mixed in. It was imbalanced and inhuman, so it brought chaos to the heart of whoever heard it.
“…”
Kyousuke blatantly clenched his teeth.
Renge could not believe anything happening before her eyes. Not that a violent Material was speaking just like a human and not that the two of them knew each other.
That was why she voiced her confusion.
“Eh? Wait…what are you saying?”
That was a mistake.
“Hm? Who the hell do you think you are, butting in between brother and me!!???”
Sounds of snapping and breaking came from all around Renge.
“Gh…bh!?”
Even as she coughed up an impressive amount of blood, she had no idea what had happened to her. She had been hit by a tremendous amount of pressure, as if thrown from a safe submarine into the deep sea at a depth of several thousand meters.
“Gah…bah!? Aghaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!?”
“Did you think you were safe with the protective circle blocking all external and internal obstructions? Stop acting like that’s your doing! That power comes from us, the Materials!! All I have to do is alter the orientation of the circle a bit…and tah dah! Get it now?”
“…Stop it.”
“Ah ha ha!! Look at that ugly mug thanks to the pressure crushing you evenly from every direction☆ A robber with a stocking over their head would probably look better. Nowww, let’s see. If I squeeze you a little more, what color of organs will come out of that mouth-…”
“I said stop it!!!!”
Shiroyama Kyousuke shouted from the bottom of his gut and the White Queen released Renge almost amusingly easily.
Kyousuke watched the shrine maiden collapse to the ground with a sticky sound, but…
“Ahh☆ When you give me such powerful orders, it reminds me of old times, brother. Such a thrill. But there is a limit to what I will let you get away with. For example…looking at other girls in my presence.”
There was a flowing difference in temperature in her words. They were human yet unstable. It made one think she could be lovingly rubbing her pet’s head one moment and crushing that head in her fist a moment later.
Shiroyama Kyousuke had thought he could help the Meinokawa sisters if he defeated Azalea Magentarain and did something about Guard of Honor.
But this changed everything.

The White Queen had laid her eyes on the Meinokawa sisters. And when they were with Shiroyama Kyousuke. That alone raised the difficulty of his original task beyond even world domination.
That was just how difficult it was to oppose her and to protect someone from her.
“Was Guard of Honor an organization made to summon you?”
“Who knows. I am quite popular, so I receive requests from all over the world. Do you really think I pay attention to why any particular person summoned me?”
In truth, it had actually been Meinokawa Renge and not Guard of Honor that had summoned the White Queen, but she did not seem to care in the slightest. She had kicked or stomped on Azalea and the old man and she had reversed the protective circle’s power to crush Renge.
The order likely had no real meaning.
Even if the other side had done the summoning, she would likely have tormented them all the same.
“I am aware of a collection of desires to acquire me using the Control method as a more definite method than instantly summoning me with a Blood-Sign and Incense Grenade, but I don’t know the details. After all, I’m not interested in anything other than you, brother☆”
Control.
That was a twisted desire held by some summoners.
The modern summoning ceremony was simple and had few risks. Anyone could feely grasp a Blood-Sign and any rookie could summon the most powerful Material, even if it was limited to ten minutes.
But that meant the gods who were reliable allies one day could stand in one’s way as the greatest demon the next day.
“However, it would seem their techniques are far from reaching your own, brother.”
“The initial job the Meinokawa sisters received included a ghost story about a white woman appearing at the harbor filled with Guard of Honor. I had assumed that was a dummy job, but now…”
“Are you even listening? Why the hell would you bring up other girls in the middle of our date? …But, but. I love you for being so utterly clueless, so I’ll forgive you! That seems to have been *another me* from a failed experiment.”
They were afraid of her.
They could not allow others to use her.
And that was why they wanted a deeper bond. Even if it was an illusion, they wanted to think that the most powerful, most beautiful, and most frightening of the monsters belonged to them alone. They wanted the peace of mind that would bring.
Instead of shuffling the deck of cards and evenly dealing them out to enemy and ally alike after each game, they would cut out the dealer and keep their own deck for themselves. They would work at it, set it up, and line it all up to obtain assured victory.

They wanted to eliminate the complicated system and simplify it. They only needed to summon from that one deck. As long as that was the ultimate trump card, they did not need anything else.
“Besides, it seems less like they want to rule over me and more like they want to be my chosen servants. That way I will prioritize them over others. It’s such a submissive way of thinking. Now. Is that really what these goddess-serving priests or queen-serving guards of honor want? Or are they simply trying to distract me from their true desire to place a collar around my neck and drag me around?”
“It’s completely insane…”
That was why they wanted that Control method.
They would place a hook in the mouth of a fish and release it into the ocean so they could reel in the fishing rod only when they wished to appreciate their catch. They would provide that limited freedom and bask in the sense of superiority it gave them. They wanted to believe that was the right thing to do.
From the moment they referred to what they summoned as mere “Materials”, it was obvious what hopes and desires guided how summoners treated them.
“Well, they tested out a lot of other ideas too. There was that…Repliglass is it? Even that was an experimental product originally meant to provide an artificial and permanent body for me in place of a vessel. Although as you can see, it was a failure☆”

“I can’t believe this…”
Kyousuke looked down to his own Blood-Sign.
That artificial serpent that controlled the gods was a bundle of silicon muscle. Was the greatest weapon that he relied on nothing more than a failed body for the Queen?
“But these days, Repliglass is used not just for military purposes but in power plants and water purification plants. Just how fast are this world’s distortions accelerating?”
The White Queen lightly clapped her hands together in front of her face.
“It’s the same idea as what you built so long ago, brother. It’s just that Guard of Honor is nowhere near your level, so I seem to recall it being ugly and overly large. …Honestly, the original one was a cute little toy that would fit in a household shrine…yes, like the size of a bottle ship. So why has it spread enough to *cover* two-sevenths of the world’s continents with this city in the center?”
Kyousuke felt a chilly fingertip running down his spine.
It did not matter to her, but that was why there was no extra layer to her words. She only spoke the truth.
“What are you all planning to do in this world?” he asked. “Wait. Don’t tell me you’re already working toward the worst possible answer!”
“Ah ha ha. I’m glad to see your proper instincts are finally coming back to you. Yes, that’s right. You need to be thinking on at least that level if you’re going to talk about me. From Toy Dream 01 to Toy Dream 40, which is currently under construction, each of the cities used a different method. It was Toy Dream 35 here that produced the greatest results. The rest of the plans were ended and all of that power and technology was concentrated here.”
The Queen’s tone was plain. Toy Dream 35 had succeeded in producing the summoning technique to control the White Queen, but that likely had little to do with Guard of Honor’s methods.
It was because a certain boy lived in that city.
The Queen had chosen to appear at that location like she was popping in for a visit on a whim.
“But it doesn’t matter to me what they might say. Guard of Honor may have been deceived, but as I already said, I am not at all interested in anyone besides you, brother. To be blunt, I wouldn’t care in the slightest if this puny city and the nation or continent around it sank into an ocean of blood.”
The White Queen smiled. “But anyways, I was a liiiiittle hopeful since I thought going along with this *would reunite me with you eventually*. I’m glad that wish came true☆”
This was the true nature of the White Queen.
If Kyousuke, who she respectfully referred to as her “brother”, would pay attention to her, she was willing to trigger a war or natural disaster. If he would rub her head, she was willing to start killing every single human

being one at a time to see how many hundreds of millions she had to kill before he would do so. That was the type of girl she was.
“Then that’s enough. You got what you wanted! There’s no reason to destroy anything else!!”
“That is fine by me, but won’t Guard of Honor continue on with this? Besides, they are the ones that want to order me to *selfishly wield my power* once they can control me.”
“Then stop them!! If they’ll listen to you, then tell them to stop!!”
“I’d rather not☆ Doesn’t that destructive turn of events sound like so much more fun? I think I can just let Guard of Honor do what they want.”
“You really…aren’t planning anything?”
“Then what do you think I’m planning?” she asked with the ultimate smile.
“Do you think I’m sending all sorts of enemies after you to finally raise you to Award 1000 so you’ll be sent to *the other side* where we can be together forever? Do you think I’m going to exterminate mankind and Material alike to create a new world for just the two of us? Do you think I want to stay in this world and try making a contract with you as your vessel? Or do you think I’m trying to visit you enough that you start empathizing with me so I can seduce you with this captivating body and spend those ten short minutes doing things I would rather not speak aloud with you? Yes, what exactly do I plan to do?”
“…”
“You decided it was no use thinking about and gave up, didn’t you? We have a winner! Do you really think I would put together some grand plot and make detailed preparations? That is the mentality of the weak who are afraid of losing and cannot stand back up if they do lose. I am meaninglessly strong and simply achieve victory, so do you really think I would think like that? No matter what kind of hell I am swallowed up by, I will never want to do anything more than flirt with you, brother.”
“Queen!!!!!”
“Brother. I believe I already said there is a limit to what I will let you get away with. If you refer to me like a stranger, it makes me want to kill you, you know? When calling to me, do it like you used to, in that manly yet adorable voice.”
The Queen gave a soft yet somehow insane smile.
“Yes. Alice (with) Rabbit, the cute little rabbit that respectfully welcomed the white ruler visiting from another world. Just like that oozingly sweet honeymoon when we become one inside that frame you provided me.”

Secret Stage 01

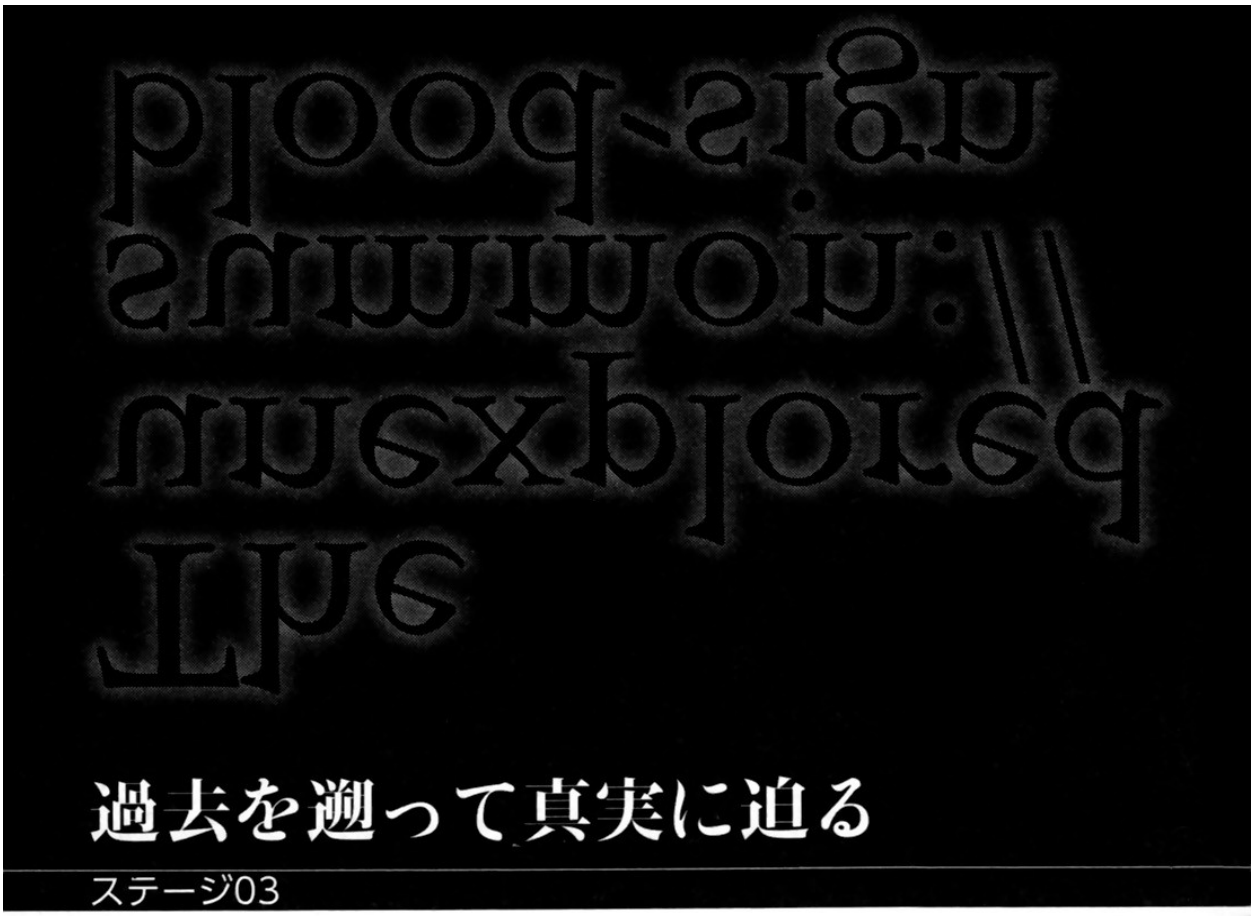
There once was an innocent boy.
That boy would help anyone asking for help.
“Passing between worlds is truly inconvenient.”
“As I stand at the very peak, calling for me is not easy. That would place a great burden on you, brother.”
“I simply wish to remain by your side like this, brother.”
That boy was too talented to realize there was a difference between the ideal and reality.
And thus he succeeded without hitting any major setbacks.
It was a device shaped like a small wooden box.
He had fully investigated the existing summoning ceremony using the Blood-Sign and Incense Grenade and he had built this different method, this new approach.
“I don’t think you should just have to obey the summoner’s orders just because you’re a Material.”
“I want to hear so much more of what you have to say. I want to hear your thoughts in their purest form.”
“After all, we’re comrades who place our lives in each other’s hands.”
And he succeeded in it all.
He lost nothing and was not asked to sacrifice anything in exchange.
Alice was a visitor from a different world and the rabbit was the guide who lived in this world.
“Wow! Wow!”
“It’s no longer restricted to ten minutes or to a battle. You can really summon me whenever and however you like.”
“Ah ha ha. Now I can go play with you whenever I want! I can give you anything I want!!”
And the boy came to regret his actions. He learned why they had been contained within the Blood-Sign’s ten minute restriction.
The system had seemed inconvenient at first, but there had been a reason for it all.
He had been faced with the greatest hell imaginable.

Facts

- The Silhouette that acts as the Material’s weak point changes size and is stored in different places depending on the specific Material.
- Guard of Honor was not simply a new force within Illegal.

- Summoners can control even the gods of legend, but some worship the Unexplored-class that lies beyond the Divine-class. Guard of Honor is an organization created to praise and serve the “White” Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth who is most popular of them all.
- Summoning one hundred Regulation-classes earns the right to summon a Divine-class and summoning fifty Divine-classes earns the right to summon an Unexplored-class.
- The Unexplored-class can also be summoned by perfectly hitting the specific Petals into the Spots in order.
- The Petals knocked into the Spots can be freely rearranged. Also, acquired petals can be cast aside without being used. Once a Material is summoned, the unused Petals are automatically discarded.
- When the number of Petals in the Artificial Sacred Ground grows low – specifically, when all seven of one of the low, middle, or high sound consonants is used up or when all of one of the vowels is used up – a new Rose appears.
- Meinokawa Renge used some unknown method to steal the contract with Meinokawa Higan away from Shiroyama Kyousuke.
- The White Queen has no interest in Guard of Honor’s actions, but she is fine with anything if it means Kyousuke will pay attention to her.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen know each other and were once lovers. …Although the way she refers to him is a little strange.

Stage 03: Travel Back in Time to Approach the Truth



過去を遡って真実に迫る

ステージ03

(Stage 03 Open 04/15 15:00
ATTENTION! "Reverse count")

「……て……よ」

「そんなに言うなら、助けてみなさいよ……」

Travel Back in Time to Approach the Truth
(Stage 03 Open 04/15 15:00
ATTENTION! “Reverse count”)
“…lp…us.”
“If you’re going to say all that, then help us.”

Part 9

Meinokawa Higan opened her eyes. Only then did she realize she was lying on something. She was inside a comfortably heated space, lying on her side atop a bed that felt like a cloud, and surrounded by a side table and one-person sofa that reminded her of a luxury hotel room.
“And now it’s time for Space Captain Whitebeard’s weather forecast! As always, I’m here live on the civilian space station Toy Dream OP-05!! First up, this evening’s atmospheric pressure…”
“Where am I…?”
Higan sat up on the bed and muttered her question while staring at the TV. As she looked around, she found some familiar faces.
“Oh.”
“Looks like she’s up.”
It was the Illegal equipment seller and the Government middleman. They were both Shiroyama Kyousuke’s acquaintances. What were their names? She dug through her memories and came up with Aika and Lu.
In that case, this was probably Aika’s apartment where she had initially escaped to.
This space did not look at all lived in, so she guessed it was one of several guest rooms. For a while now, Higan had not known where she would spend the night or what she would eat, so this was on an unimaginable scale for her.
Swimsuit Girl Aika was lazily leaning against the wall.
“It’s already *three o’clock*… I’m hungry… Onii-chan, Onii-chan. Your little sister wants a snack.”
“Eh? Um, three o’clock?”
“That’s how long you’ve been asleep. We have sesame dumplings to snack on. Mwa ha ha ha. Bow down to me and I might just share some with you!”
Higan waking up must have meant something to Aika and Lu Niang Lan because they left through the door.
However, Higan still had no idea what was going on.

(It was around eight in the morning when we went to search for my sister, wasn't it?)
Seven hours had passed since then. What had happened?
Normally, a vessel did not lose their memories even when letting a Material reside in their body and fighting with an abnormal mind and psyche, but something had been different this time. However, she could not remember what exactly that difference was.
She looked to the digital clock on the bedside table and tilted her head, but then she remembered something important.
What had happened to her sister Renge?
Had they found her? Had they met up with her? Had she come back safely? Or…?
"W-wait… Tell me what happened. Um, where's my sister!?"
She quickly stood from the bed and tried to chase after Aika and Lu Niang Lan who had left the room. On the way, she was shocked to find she was still wearing that sketchy maid outfit, but she had more important things to worry about.
She needed to gather what information she could, so she flung open the guest room door.
"And another thing! Now that I think about it, how could you make my adorable sister walk around town in that unnatural maid outfit!? And she wasn't wearing anything below the skirt!? What the hell were you thinking!?"
She found a pure and traditional Japanese shrine maiden sitting on top of a boy and swinging her clenched fist down at him. She was beating him up while using some slightly filthy language.
"Nfh, nfh!? I-I already explained that! The only other options were her soaking wet and thus see-through shrine maiden outfit or walking around town at night in the nude!!"
"I will accept she needed different clothes, but explain how that could possibly lead to putting her in a maid outfit!!"
"Can we maybe discuss this more calmly? Besides, that was something Lu-san forced onto me when she was drunk once, so it wasn't my idea. It should have been obvious that outfit was out of the ordinary from the fact that it didn't come with any underwear!! Kah!!"
"You make it sound like it was right to not let her wear any panties, so maybe I need to hit this broken TV a little harder. Well? Don't you think? Well?"
Higan finally breathed a sigh of relief when she saw her sister creating a series of dull impacts.
Her sister was right in front of her.
That was perfectly normal, but the path to retrieve that perfectly normal thing had been a long one.
But even as the relief washed over her, the sounds of destruction prevented her tears from flowing.

Should she maybe stop this?
She decided she probably should.
“R-Renge… Wait, um, it may be true he claimed he didn’t have anything else for me to wear and forced this ridiculous outfit onto me, but, um, he did save us.”
“Wait, you idiot! Don’t walk that close when you’re dressed like that, Higan!!”
“?”
“You’re not wearing any panties!! So what’s going to happen when you walk up next to a boy lying on his back!?”
“……”
It took her several seconds to properly grasp the situation.
It took a few more seconds for Higan to drop her heel on Shiroyama Kyousuke’s face with every inch of her own face beet red and for Renge to continue raining blows down on him.

Part 8

“I’ve learned something about Guard of Honor,” said Aika after contacting someone. “The battle at the harbor was a complete loss, but a few of the summoners had small cameras on them and we’ve finished analyzing that footage. It’s only of those outside the Artificial Sacred Ground, though.”
When an Incense Grenade was in effect, the summoners and vessels would vanish from all cameras and sensors, but they still showed up just fine between battles.
The modified China dress beauty sounded exasperated.
“That sure took long for some simple facial recognition.”
The time was *2:30 PM*. Lu Niang Lan must have been bored without any information and without anything to do because she had fried some sesame dumplings for a snack (using someone else’s kitchen without asking). They were currently on standby. Watching Meinokawa Higan sleep for so very long had not produced any noticeable results.
But now some good news had come in.
They were all starving for information.
“That’s just how long it took, so there’s no helping it. Although technically, all we know is that comparing them against every known summoner and vessel didn’t turn up a single match”
“What do you mean?”
Shiroyama Kyousuke frowned and Aika put her hands on her hips.

“That means they don’t belong to any of the three major groups.”
“Wait a minute. After all that, we have nothing!?” cut in Meinokawa Renge.
“They were all skilled enough to easily summon Divine and Unexplored-classes. They weren’t exactly being covert, so they would have to have been caught by someone’s antenna somewhere.”
“When we checked those registered as normal people with no connection to the world of summoning, we found a ton of matches. This is only a guess, but I think I know where Guard of Honor came from.”
Kyousuke quietly continued for Aika.
“They didn’t start as summoners or vessels. They got involved in the summoning ceremony some other way.”
“What do you mean by that?”
“*Normal people. The many ‘others’ who saw our battles and had their memories and cognizance automatically rewritten without even knowing it.* Not even the experts like us know exactly how things are overwritten in their minds. No, maybe we don’t know *because* we’re the experts. We can’t deny the possibility that some of them are implanted with something that attracts them to the Material. Y’know, something like Stockholm syndrome.”
They all fell silent.
Just how frightening a theory that was slowly sank in.
Finally, Kyousuke said more.
“At first, they weren’t necessarily directly caught in the middle of one of the White Queen’s battles. In fact, the odds of that are way too low. But it’s the same in the end. Even if they started pursuing some minor Material, their self-study would ultimately lead them to the White Queen at the very top. So no matter where they started, they would all be ensnared by her after crossing a certain line. It might be like an ant lion pit or a black hole. And it would work the same for an expert and an amateur. …I should have caught on sooner. Sooner or later and for better or for worse, anyone who comes into contact with the summoning ceremony is sucked in toward the White Queen to a certain extent. That’s just how large a presence she is.”
“Wait…”
That scratchy voice of protest of course came from Renge.
She seemed to be trying to reject something.
“That doesn’t make sense. We really were attacked by the Divine-class Yamata-no-Orochi and the Unexplored-class Lady of Purple Lightning! A normal person could never summon those! Even in the world of experts, someone has to spend a life of work to maybe reach that realm!”
“Originally, it was probably a small grassroots sort of community that showed up sporadically. It may not have held their attention, so they might have even returned to their senses pretty quickly,” spat out Kyousuke. “But I’m guessing someone gave them some help. Someone constructed an organization, managed it, taught them how to run it, taught them how to

earn funding and build up connections, and most importantly, gave them high level instructions on summon ceremony combat."
"Azalea Magentarain. An important member of the world-class defense contractor Quad Motors and Government Award 930. She had everything needed to trigger that 'mutation'."
"It may not just have been her," added blue-eyed Lu Niang Lan. "Guard of Honor was initially mistaken for a new Illegal organization, remember? Maybe they happened to find some participants from Illegal. If so, they might have had an instructor or two each from Government, Illegal, and even Freedom."
"As unique as the summoning ceremony is, it's still a type of skill. Maybe they used drugs or suggestion for some abnormal teaching method. Or maybe having their memories and cognizance automatically rewritten upon witnessing a Material was enough to plant *the inspiration leading to superb genius* as if frying their brain. Either way, they might have some way of artificially creating ace-level summoners."
"B-but…"
Renge must not have been able to believe it because she continued arguing. Her pride as a professional summoner may have had something to do with it.
"The summoning ceremony is a deadly battle. Even if they were given the necessary knowledge in the classroom, they still couldn't reach the Divine-class or Unexplored-class. They wouldn't be able to defeat those of us who've been in real battles! Wouldn't they need a fair bit of actual experience before they could create the hell we saw in that harbor!?"
"Yes, and they probably built up that experience."
"How!? If they had done anything, one of the three groups would have noticed them!" Renge continued shouting as if to cast aside her own doubts.
"They couldn't just practice together like friends. Not even a vessel can fully control the violence of the Material. They can only guide it, so holding back is simply impossible. Even in a mock battle, you have a good possibility of crushing your opponent!!"
"Yes," smoothly replied Kyousuke with his expression as calm as a Noh mask. "So maybe they've been standing by our side for quite a while now. They've stuck to the category of the harmless masses as they steal the techniques we use."
Meinokawa Renge was overcome by a strange sense of disgust, like she had been blindfolded and then had a thick tongue licking across her back.
Meanwhile, Kyousuke continued speaking.
"They would learn everything they could just by watching. And on occasion they would wait for a battle to grow *too chaotic to tell who was attacking* or guide the battle in that direction. Then they would summon their own Material and butt in to earn the experience points in actual battle they needed. And of course, they would be killing all of the people they used as a stepping stone."

“But Onii-chan. We checked for battle records where multiple groups fought and everyone ended up dead, but we couldn’t find any sign of Guard of Honor. In fact, if we had, this would have become an issue much sooner.”
“Finding zero errors is no reason to relax. That just shows how thoroughly and cleverly they’ve been hiding the evidence. …Besides, even if it led you to the wrong conclusion, Government wouldn’t have hired an external summoner to attack that harbor if you didn’t have some information on them.”
If they succeeded, they could slip into the crowd and feign ignorance.
If they failed, they would be categorized as a normal person who had the misfortune to be caught in the crossfire.
How much would they have to repeat that process for an uninvolved person to become a summoning ace?
They had continued secretly devouring that knowledge in the shadows of history for long enough to do that.
That much was certain.
And they had not built up just a single ace. They had enough for an entire organization.
The secrecy behind Guard of Honor felt like a monstrous maw in and of itself. It felt even more frightening than their pure combat ability.
“…”
Renge could not rid herself of the chill.
It came both from Guard of Honor for growing in that way and from Shiroyama Kyousuke for so calmly seeing through it all.
How much were people distorted when they grew too closely involved with the White Queen?
It was said the development of art was always closely connected to religious motifs. It was also said the evolution of life required a harsh environment.
The presence of the White Queen may have fulfilled both roles in human society.
Just like the animals that learned to wield fire became humans.
Just like the armies that equipped themselves with iron built great kingdoms.
“Looking back at the battle in the harbor, Guard of Honor might have several skilled summoners on the Award 800 and 900 level.” Aika expressed her thoughts as a part of a large organization. “The exact number of members is unknown. Is it dozens, hundreds, or thousands? We don’t even know that. That means Government can’t do anything until we’ve gathered some accurate data.”
“Of course not,” said Lu Niang Lan, the modified China dress beauty. “You might only be planning to mop them up quickly, but you could carelessly trigger a much longer fight. And while you’re struggling there, it would be a real tragedy if one of the other groups stabbed you from the side. The world’s power balance could truly be rewritten, so none of the organizations

are going to act. In fact, they might focus on keeping an eye on each other, hoping one of the others will overplay their hand."
Their opponent would be planning to use that chaos to its fullest. The battle in the harbor and the escape of the Meinokawa sisters had both been unexpected events for Guard of Honor, so they would probably try to end this quickly, before any leaked information could harm them.
"The White Queen, huh?" spat out Kyousuke.
Everyone there fell silent. From the lowest rookie to the topmost expert, almost any summoner knew that name and even respected it in some way. However, its meaning changed entirely coming from that boy's mouth.
"In Government, Illegal, and Freedom, her popularity exceeds even the Three and reaches the level of worship. …There's even a wooden statue of her at our shrine as the unofficial second god."
The White Queen was almost certainly the focus of Guard of Honor.
With enough skill, the Queen became more than something to look up to. She became something one could actually summon. She became an achievable legend. And then they could teach a lesson to every other summoner and vessel.
She was a symbol of strength.
She was a symbol of beauty.
And most of all, she was a symbol of righteousness. She was an overwhelming symbol that those concepts and statuses could be acquired by brute force.
"As the Guard of Honor that protects the Queen, decorates her, and performs her ceremony, they intend to permanently keep her here for themselves, using a form of the Control method. They want to use a special summoning method different from the standard time-limited Blood-Sign method," spat out Kyousuke. "That Sewn Realm Summoning *is the method I once used successfully.*"
The modern summoning ceremony using the Incense Grenade and Blood-Sign was the most certain and simplified summoning technique that required the least preparation. It did not require a sacrifice or a temple built over centuries and it allowed one to freely control any monster, god, or even those who existed beyond that. It could be seen as the ultimate technique.
But it was a little too convenient.
Everyone could equally summon any Material, so there was no clear concept of enemy or ally.
That was why some would look at it in reverse.
"What a ridiculous desire," muttered the boy while his eyes seemed to focus on the past. "The Materials leave your hand after every battle, so it's a lot like wanting to seal them inside a card and collect them. …It's a truly one-on-one summoning ceremony that doesn't allow any interference from anyone else. If you could put a collar on the monster, summon it whenever you wanted, and send it away whenever you wanted, that would be the

same as an eternal summoning that ignored the ten minute time limit. And the ability to summon it at will would eliminate the risk of the Material killing you in your sleep.”
“Hm? But Onii-chan, isn’t there something wrong with that?”
“Yes. There’s a hole in that concept of monopolizing a Material. In this case, the summoner could call the White Queen between the two worlds at will, as if pulling a lever, but even if she had a collar, another summoner could still summon her with the Blood-Sign method while she’s waiting in the other world.”
“Then what does Guard of Honor want to do? There’s still a risk of being attacked by the White Queen, right? If that doesn’t change, wouldn’t the current method work just as well?”
“But isn’t that exactly what the traditional priests did?” Kyousuke sounded fed up with it all. “They respectfully bowed to their god while looking down on and ordering around the common folk. They called themselves the gatekeepers of miracles and built temples or cathedrals to make themselves even more special. But the gods themselves were protecting the civilization and the world as a whole. There are legends of gods exceeding the bounds of the church or temple and saving the common folk. Even so, the priests would insist they are the standard, no matter what anyone might say.”
“Kyousuke-chan. Are you saying Guard of Honor would simply overlook it if the White Queen’s power was leaking out to others? They would claim to have the strongest bond and insist those others are getting carried away, even if those excuses are no practical help whatsoever?”
Lu Niang Lan’s voice contained strong hints of doubt and confusion, but that may have been because the way priests felt joy in serving a supreme being did not fit with how summoners wielded those gods as tools and weapons. Even if she was an exception among exceptions who defeated her enemies without summoning a single Material herself.
“I don’t know since I’m not one of them. But based on what Azalea and the White Queen were saying, they intend to provide her with true freedom and serve her as soon as they complete their Control method.”
“What!? They’re causing all this trouble to put a collar on the White Queen, but their final objective is to release her and have her step on them!?”
“Well, the harder it is for normal people to understand a desire, the stronger some will crave it.”
“That sounds pretty dangerous coming from someone with those lumps of fat on her chest.”
“It sounds nice and clean coming from you, Aika. Then again, it might be even less of a laughing matter with that slender frame of yours.”
Kyousuke cut in to drive the point home.
“Unless we actually peer into their hearts, we can’t know whether this is actually what they want or if it’s just an excuse allowing them to ignore their more depraved desires.”

Renge still had trouble accepting this and that may have led her to nitpick Shiroyama Kyousuke's opinion.
"Truly one-on-one… Summoning and sending them away at will…" She seemed to groan the terms below her breath. "Th-this framework of a Sewn Realm Summoning and the Control method may be new, but it feels more like taking a step backwards. Isn't that the same as the magic circle summonings in picture books?"
"Yes. Ideologically, it's like the First Summoning Ceremony. Technique-wise, it's like the Second Summoning Ceremony," agreed Kyousuke. "But no one has actually taken that to a usable level."
"Eh?"
"The gods of legend appear to protect some group, be it a tribe, a village, a nation, a continent, or all mankind. Contracts with an individual are almost unheard of. There are some extreme exceptions like the Annunciation, but in that case, the god was selecting the appropriate human. Cases where the human chooses the god and makes an exclusive contract are a different matter altogether."
"Now that…you mention it…"
"Then what about demons summoned with a piece of parchment? Humans can summon them, but anyone can summon them. After the contract fails or is completed, the demon searches for the next human. That lacks uniqueness. I'm talking about a purely exclusive contract that's something like a marriage. It's bound between two individuals and then no one else can summon it, even the summoner's children or grandchildren. …That dream is pure enough to be drawn in picture books, but that pure beauty is something that cannot be achieved by human hands."
"Um, Kyousuke-chan. I don't think that would function as a proper system of techniques. If no one can inherit it, it has no way to spread."
"That's right. If that succeeded, mankind would never be able to summon that Material again once the summoner's lifespan came to an end. That's one thing that Solomon's 72 did well. Those secret techniques were built up into a workable system, but that's also why they ultimately spread as standard fortune telling and good luck charms."
Even Kyousuke's original Sewn Realm Summoning had not fully bound the White Queen, so the risk of other summoners summoning her beyond that framework had remained. Not even he had been able to cross that boundary into the "unexplored".
"But even as a group, Guard of Honor can't reach what you once completed, right?"
Lu Niang Lan worked to keep her voice cheerful and Kyousuke stopped to think for a moment.
"Yes, they will fail. And even if they fail, this will cause great damage, but…"
He trailed off there.

Something there filled even Alice (with) Rabbit with a feeling of hesitation. He was likely overpowered by a specific example of that “great damage”.
As if taking a detour around a blocked road, Aika changed the subject.
“According to Government’s official report, a luxury cruise ship called the Princess Azalea is docked here at Toy Dream 35.”
“Oh, dear. I’m surprised Quad Motors actually provided you with that information.”
“They refused at first, but they decided this was too much to cover up. …It has 1500 beds, the ship itself is made of Repliglass, and it can travel around the world while barely needing to resupply because it extracts the silicon materials dissolved in the seawater.”
“Do you think that’s their base?”
“It would probably be faster to ask Kyousuke-chan,” said Lu Niang Lan.
Everyone’s focus turned to Shiroyama Kyousuke as he slowly opened his mouth.
“If they took the same path as me, they drew on the image of the fairy’s spring. That would be the type in picture books with the gold and silver axes. That lets you freely summon a supernatural being from another world and have them grant your wish. It’s an extremely restricted contact point for humans. And conveniently, Toy Dream 35 is a type of ocean city, so it has plenty of water. If they brought in their giant ship, they could make whatever secret preparations they wanted inside.”
But then he made a reversal and began rejecting the idea.
“But I don’t think it’s the ship. If the mobile cruise ship was their base, they wouldn’t need to do anything inside Toy Dream 35 itself. The Princess Azalea probably isn’t what we’re looking for.”
“You don’t have any…evidence of that, do you?”
“I have no proof,” he bluntly admitted. “But the White Queen stands at the top of Guard of Honor. Even if she talks about it in roundabout and majestic codes that only those in the know would understand, she really only thinks about me. She might be making grand commands and manipulating Guard of Honor’s summoners, but there’s really no logic behind it. …She only wants me to pay attention to her, so she’s only thinking about where she can lure me.”
“It surprised me back then, but why is she so obsessed with you? In fact, if she’s head over heels for you, can’t you just ask her to end all this?”
“Give up on that idea. And that isn’t the best way of describing it. *The only thing the White Queen is in love with is love*. It may look like she’s chosen me, but that’s because I’m tougher and harder to break than other people. I’m not stupid enough to try to control her when she could ‘wake up’ at any moment.”
Kyousuke and the White Queen knew each other, so they likely understand how the other thought better than anyone else.
No matter what emotions those thoughts were based on.

“So in the opinion of the great Shiroyama Kyousuke, what location seems most suspect to you?”
“The staff only areas,” he immediately responded. “Toy Dream 35 is a city-sized amusement park, but they need to construct a great number of systems to protect its image of hopes and dreams: trash collection, staff transportation, and covertly moving celebrities to avoid a commotion. … There’s probably a spider web of hidden passageways not opened to the public for a variety of reasons.”
Quad Motors’ Repliglass was a blessing in many areas of life, but the largest one was construction and underground excavation technology. The development of equipment modeled after bugs that lived underground like earthworms and earwigs had brought an end to the days when tunnels or dams took decades to build. If the earth’s environment were to be ruined by global warming or pollution, some specialists were suggesting it would be faster to dig underground than to escape to the moon or Mars. Swimsuit Girl Aika spoke in a monotone voice.
“Technically, that spider web of staff only passageways runs from one end of this ultra high-rise city to the other on multiple levels and while complexly intersecting, so it covers a distance of more than three million kilometers in all. There are about two hundred thousand residents and an estimated fifteen million tourists. About nine thousand tons of trash are produced and five thousand forty-foot containers of goods and materials are shipped in every day. That’s the problem with relying on external agricultural and industry in order to help out the local area. And including part-time and full-time workers, the staff is made up of approximately twenty thousand people. All of this personnel and equipment has to be smoothly moved in and out without the guests seeing and the staff needs the infrastructure to eat, take breaks, and take showers.”
“In other words, *something that vast is boldly hidden from view*. Looking at pure surface area, you could probably say there’s another entire city coexisting with Toy Dream 35.”
Modern summoners like Kyousuke used the Incense Grenade to create an Artificial Sacred Ground, but a natural sacred ground was a location where the beings of legend could naturally appear.
But due to the spread of the internet and civilian satellites, it turned out those mysterious spaces that normal people naturally avoided were far less common than anyone had imagined.
“So the underside of a massive amusement park has become a modern sacred ground. It’s a place you can’t see inside by punching the name into a search engine or booting up a map or satellite app. And it’s a rare space where everyone accepts that and in fact prefers not seeing it.”
“Now that you mention it, you’re right. …Looking at it like that, this place is far more twisted than some strangely discounted real estate or a ghost tunnel.”

“Everyone knows it’s there, but everyone turns a blind eye because they don’t want to ruin the dream. They’ll irresponsibly spread rumors about it containing a giant underground casino that uses illegal rates or hidden passageways for human traffickers that kidnap babies, but maybe that’s because normal people naturally want to keep their distance.”
“I get it now. That might be why Guard of Honor was pursuing me so intently,” groaned Shrine Maiden Renge. “If those staff only passageways and facilities are their base, then I was looking right at it. That’s exactly what I was using to hide after escaping from the harbor.”
“Twenty thousand staff members use those passageways every day, but they might not be able to recognize the symbols of the summoning ceremony. … That would change if a professional summoner peeked inside, though.”
Guard of Honor may have feared Renge had seen their grand plan, so they had made sure to hunt her down.
That was why even former Government Award 930, Golden Luxury, had been sent after her.
“Guard of Honor’s goal must be to remake that vast staff only space into a sacred ground for the White Queen. That would indeed let them escape the yoke of the Incense Grenade and its Artificial Sacred Ground.”
“But that might not be all,” said Kyousuke.
“The modern summoning ceremony is a method to safely, surely, and swiftly summon those ‘not of this world’,” said Swimsuit Girl Aika. “So just like a tanka or haiku, all the waste has been shaved away, leaving no room for anything else. Forcing in anything else will distort the whole.”
Modified China Dress Lu Niang Lan sighed.
“We have no idea if that sacred ground would last for a minute or a century, but Kyousuke-chan said before that the Sewn Realm Summoning is not bound by the rules of the Blood-Sign method. And this will be the abnormal monster known as the White Queen going on a rampage. Kyousuke-chan, give it to us straight. How bad is this compared to normal?”
“Yes, I stopped before, but I guess I should tell you.” Kyousuke spoke carefully. “I don’t know how accurate their Sewn Realm Summoning is, but whatever the case, they’re trying to construct a ‘spring’ using the entire ocean bordering Toy Dream 35. In that case, the White Queen’s influence will cover the entire ocean. Just like the spring the fairy comes from is known as the fairy’s spring.”
“The entire ocean? Are you saying the whole city will turn into a deadly region of sea?”
“By entire, I meant the entire thing. In the worst case, it would cover every ocean on earth.”
Kyousuke’s words caused not just Renge but even Aika and Lu Niang Lan to freeze up a little.
“The White Queen is something like a black hole that distorts time and space. Keeping that in this world by illegitimate means will drag countless other Materials, both large and small, in with her. With me, it was localized,

so we somehow managed to bring it to an end. But if her influence spread to the seven seas, there would be nothing mankind could do. Even if only the smallest theoretical number appeared, the history of primates would probably meet an untimely end."
"It'd be that bad?" Renge was dumbfounded. "But…it's the White Queen, isn't it? Everyone relies on her and she's being summoned in important wars all over the world, right? How could summoning her just once bring about the end of the world?"
"Oh, none of this would happen if she's summoned normally," replied Kyousuke. "The Blood-Sign method uses the Incense Grenade, vessel, Petals, and White Thorns like it's a sport. Anyone can start it, but truly achieving victory is complicated and roundabout. To someone without any real skill, it would probably look like what Material is summoned comes down to pure chance. But all of those steps and decorations are safety measures. If you mess with that black box without knowing why it's there, you'll only have the critical vulnerabilities leftover. …And that could be enough to destroy the world."
"Does Guard of Honor know about that?"
"At the very least, Azalea didn't seem to. She questioned why the Rose used twenty-six letters instead of twenty-two, but it didn't look like she had dug into it any further."
What if Materials not controlled by a summoner and vessel endlessly overflowed into this world?
They might directly prey on mankind until humans went extinct, they might ignore the humans altogether, or they might create friendships using a method other than the modern summoning ceremony.
The only certainty was that the existing peace held together by the existing countries would be destroyed in the blink of an eye by the creatures that crawled up from the ocean. In that period of chaos, national borders and currencies would collapse and some percentage of the human race would be lost due to the intense chaos and famine.
"What does Guard of Honor want to do?" muttered Renge, looking like her senses had numbed over. "The Control method? They don't care who summons her, but they want to be the chosen servants who serve her before anyone else? But what do they hope to gain by getting so close to the White Queen?"
"I doubt they're even thinking about what happens after they meet her," spat out Kyousuke. "The accomplishment is their goal, so they aren't thinking about what happens after they arrive in heaven. According to the Queen, their Control system is meant to create an environment where they can hold audiences with her as the chosen servants while ignoring the slight holes in that system. But as I said before, we don't know if that's what they actually want or if they're turning a blind eye to some other desire. It's also possible they themselves aren't aware of that other desire. If that's the

case, they'll be unable to control it and will be *swallowed up* without ever knowing what it was."
"…"
Renge fell silent.
Not because she found that creepy. It was because she sympathized with them just a tiny bit.
That may have been because she was a shrine maiden instead of a pure summoner.
The intense popularity of the White Queen and a longing for her strength were common to all summoners. Renge herself could not remember where that had come from. She had stepped onto that path without realizing it and that path was precisely what led to the driving force that had driven Guard of Honor mad.
There was no special staring point.
Everyone stood on that path, the question was whether they walked down it or not. That was the only difference.
"I also think they believe the White Queen will solve every problem in the world. Probably some convenient belief that she'll exterminate all of the monsters covering this planet."
But Kyousuke thought the White Queen might truly be capable of that.
That was because he knew the true threat she posed, not just the legends.
However…
(She would never care what happens to the world or to mankind.)
The insane retainers had an insane queen.
He grimaced because he felt like he had caught a glimpse of who his enemy truly was.
"They're twisted in two ways."
To know something was not always a positive thing.
"First, Guard of Honor has been driven mad by the White Queen and will do anything to please her. And second, the White Queen doesn't care in the slightest about those people she's driven mad. …It's frightening *because* the gears don't fit together. No negotiations, persuasion, or threats will work here. They'll continue on forever in their madness."
Whatever the case, they had no time.
And currently, the only ones who could stop the White Queen and Guard of Honor was this group centered on Shiroyama Kyousuke.
After all, every last one of the codes, symbols, signs, commands, documents, and other suggestive statements was nothing more than the White Queen playing around.
Everything was set up so the first thing Shiroyama Kyousuke would think of would be of utmost importance.

Part 7

Azalea Magentarain and Fractal Leskins, the pair known as Golden Luxury, had returned to a certain place.
After the battle at eight in the morning, they were only returning now at *1:40 PM*. That was just how long it had taken for their condition to stabilize after the serious wounds they received from the White Queen.
This was one of the vast forbidden areas of Toy Dream 35 blocked off by staff only doors. The emergency water purification plant was located even deeper than the ocean. It was a transparent spherical container with a radius of ten meters. It dangled down near the ceiling and it was filled with bacteria made of Repliglass.
It "ate" and purified any impurity, but Azalea had helped design it and knew it was no actual use whatsoever. First, seawater could be made into drinking water even with something like an oil refinery's distillation tower. Second, the bacteria pool could not meet the demand of Toy Dream 35 which consumed 450 tons of water every day for home and business use. Third, the Japanese had a bad habit of making a brand name out of safety and purchasing it. In other words, it was nothing more than a way to show off the city's cutting edge technology.
Thus, the vast underground space would never actually be used.
It was much more efficient than digging down below a strange Western mansion and building a ceremonial ground there.
In the end, they had not reached Shiroyama Kyousuke's level.
They could create a convenient "spring", but they could not drag out the higher-level lifeform known as a Material.
Thus they were attempting to achieve their goal in an incomplete form.
Instead of dragging their queen to the surface, they would dive down below even the vast spring of the ocean and they would hold an audience with their absolute ruler lurking in the depths of another world.
If the spring's fairy would not come out, they only had to jump in themselves.
Even if they could only hold their breath for a short time, they only needed to catch a glimpse and bow their heads.
Even if they drowned, that was enough.
"Are you sure you're okay?" asked a young man.
He was one of those known as Uniquely Selfless. He had cast aside all else and vowed to become the "chosen servant" of his beloved White Queen. He was now one of the guards of honor that lacked individuality.
The meaning of his question was obvious: Azalea and Fractal had bandages and gauze covering their bodies. And rather than pure white, they were

soaked with painful-looking red in places. The shock of the sight was all the greater when combined with Azalea's slight frame.
But that girl smiled thinly.
"Of course I am. Not only did we have the honor of a direct audience with Her Majesty, she directly *caressed and toyed with* us. What greater joy is there in this pitiful world?"
"Perhaps. I am truly jealous."
The young man was not being sarcastic. He really did think that from the bottom of his heart.
Ultimately, they would be filled with joy even if they were killed, so long as it was at the hands of the White Queen.
While aiming to Control her, they wished to give her freedom so she might crush them underfoot. They wished to be trampled first to show the world's summoners just how close they were to that queen.
That was who they were.
"Still, you certainly took your time."
"Yes," agreed Azalea.
Her audience with the White Queen had held one other important meaning.
"For some reason, conditions are naturally aligning to more easily summon Her Majesty. Even second- or third-rate summoners from Award 150 to 200 can summon her now. This is a sign that her influence is gathering in reality. Don't you think the time is just about right?"
The Queen currently resided inside a pure white cocoon.
This was not the cheap dregs that anyone could summon to a limited degree with a Blood-Sign. This was the truly noble White Queen, pinned to this world with a different method so that they might hold an audience with her.
However, they could not break open the cocoon to check on its contents and they lacked the technology to perform a nondestructive scan.
Judging when it was okay to *let her out* was the biggest bottleneck for Guard of Honor.
"Are you ready?"
"Yes. We're all Uniquely Selfless, but every one of us has been putting in an effort worth a gold medal. Earlier, we calmly defeated Illegal Award 880 and Freedom Award 854 that were sniffing around. I may be one of us, but we really are an unbelievable collection of mutations. Do you want to go greet them all?"
"That will not be necessary," bluntly rejected Azalea. "We are all equally Uniquely Selfless after all."
Including Azalea from Government, they had three at the 900 level to act as instructors. However, they had no concept of a favorite apprentice. There was no hierarchy whatsoever. They had no center. It did not matter who had founded the group or who had caused the mutation. No one cared who crawled at their feet or surpassed everyone else. These guards of honor were all equally Uniquely Selfless.
The young man did not push any further.

“We have to settle this quickly. We safely gathered an even greater force than expected, but we barely have any food or other supplies needed to live here. Don’t think you’re going to get anything better than a burger to eat.”
“Oh? That’s one more thing to look forward to. Just what kind of thrill awaits me here?”
Azalea the junk food junky licked her small lips and the old butler sighed.
“The ceremony won’t be an issue,” continued Uniquely Selfless. “We were running Projects 01 through 55 in this city alone, but we’ve gathered all the data from the various failures. Now we can fill the holes left in the equation.”
There were stories of a white woman in the harbor.
Quad Motors had a secret project to create an entirely artificial vessel out of Repliglass.
It had been known from the beginning that those past projects would fail. It had all been to complete a single equation.
It had all been for this one true goal: the creation of the incomplete cocoon and the emergence of what resided inside.
“What about the decorations? We will be summoning Her Majesty, so a dusty old hideout is out of the question.
“It has all been brought here from the Princess Azalea. And this really is unbelievable. I’m pretty sure a golden palace in Russia would have more restraint than this.”
“This is the bare minimum. I wanted enough to fill one hundred cruise ships, but I restrained myself and chose very carefully.”
Guard of Honor had enough sense to restrict themselves to the bare minimum in order to hide their plot. In truth, the most difficult part had been naturally bringing in the mountains of furniture and artwork needed to create a suitable palace for the White Queen. They could not use a normal moving service. And moving so much at once would catch the eye of the hyenas looking for a deal on the precious metals market or at antiques auctions. But if they hid it in some complex way, they would be suspected of tax evasion. The ultimate answer had been cruise ships. Instead of hiding their intentions, they showed off that a rich individual was carrying their luxurious residence with them in a way that did not rouse suspicion. And several cruise ships would blend into the normal scenery at the giant seaside amusement park of Toy Dream 35.
So the Princess Azalea and four other cruise ships had gathered and the treasures inside had been secretly carried out.
It was all to construct a gorgeous palace suitable for the White Queen.
The focus on the decorations over the plan itself showed who they really were. They did not act based on self-interest or logic. It was all about emotion. They only wished to be the White Queen’s absolute servants and to receive her love. They were priests or a guard of honor.
They all wished to equally earn the Award that only one boy had ever earned before: Loved by the White.

“This is where it all begins. I’m sure we will be very busy.”
“Yes.”
That was all they needed.
They were willing to engulf the planet in an ocean of fresh blood for that.

Part 6

It was *just before 1:00 PM* and Shiroyama Kyousuke headed out while trying to slip into the lunchtime crowds as much as he could.
This was incredibly dangerous when he did not have his vessel partner with him and he did not know where the Guard of Honor members were, but he wanted to visit his cruiser no matter what.
The next battle would be the last.
He wanted to gather as much Blood-Sign maintenance tools and Incense Grenades as he could.
However…
“Brother. I know this violates the schedule, but I just couldn’t wait any longer☆”
He was thrown into an Artificial Sacred Ground without warning.
Immediately, a spine-chillingly sweet voice reached his ears. He looked back in shock and found the White Queen approaching. The way she waved and jogged over looked just like a girl who had spotted the person she had arranged to meet.
(I didn’t notice an Incense Grenade detonation. So was I dragged into the Artificial Sacred Ground using a Chain!?)
Not to mention that the White Queen could not be summoned right away. And the summoning ceremony format was centered on a battle, so it could not be activated when the summoner was alone. He could not summon a Material without fighting alongside someone else.
There were examples of allies fighting each other to summon a specific powerful Material.
That was commonly referred to as cannibalism.
Even if a Material could be somewhat controlled by the vessel’s will, it was not 100% accurate. In other words, they would sometimes not hesitate to crush their opponent even in a battle between allies. While rising up through the ranks of the Regulation, Divine, and Unexplored-classes, just how many summoners had been “cannibalized”?
“Even if it’s because my influence has spread across this entire city *as I lurk in the watery depths*, it gets on my nerves to be Summoned so simply. But

I'll allow it if it means meeting you!! But…oh? I can appear here more easily because of the me that's down there…but I'm also here… Hmm???"
Had she forced them through all that for a tryst that would last just a few minutes?
But that question seemed meaningless when faced with the White Queen's smile that glowed with absolute purity.
"This is about my beloved brother. Destroying a nation or two would be well worth it, don't you think?"
"Beloved, huh?"
"Does something about that bother you?"
"I don't think there's anything about it that doesn't."
If the White Queen's love for him were real, he could use it.
However, she was essentially in love with being in love.
It was unclear whether she knew that herself, but Kyousuke did not trust her love. Even if he did try to manipulate her through her feelings of love, the odds were good she would suddenly "wake up" at some point. When his life and the world's future hung in the balance, that was far too dangerous.
"Why are you here?"
"Oh, come on☆ The details of that are far too vulgar to come from a lovely maiden's mouth, so I'll have to be more vague. You could say I'm here to have some fun with you. Is that a problem?"
Kyousuke honestly thought the structure of the world was entirely worthless.
No matter how much one built up and no matter how valiantly one risked their life to face the unreasonable side of the world, a far-too-powerful being like this would end up rendering all that change meaningless with a single willful command. But when he thought about it, that should have been obvious. She stood at the peak of the Unexplored-class that was hidden beyond even the most hidden of the Divine-class.
She did not obey the world. The world obeyed her.
"Oh, dear. Brother, you don't seem very excited."
"I'm sick of you calling me that. It isn't even possible for a human and a Material to have a blood relation."
"But when I search for 'a reliable gentleman' that is the word that pops up."
He had no idea what she really meant by "search".
She may have spent many long nights curled up in an internet café or she might have checked some collection of information, like the Akashic Records, in the depths of the *other world* where the Unexplored-class lurked. To her, they both were about as meaningful.
No.
Perhaps it would be more accurate to say he knew nothing about the Queen. The world's scholars were greatly divided even about her origin. Shiroyama Kyousuke had once walked by her side, yet not even he knew her true age.
He had no intention of being manipulated by the strange theories that said she had existed alongside human civilization from the birth of mankind or

that said she had been born just this instant and history was being overwritten in real time to add her in. But if someone asked him if he knew the answer, he would have to shake his head. He did not know the source of her power, he did not know why she had a feminine form and heart, and he did not know why she chose to almost mockingly refer to him as her brother.

“Setting aside siblings, do you even have a concept of parents and children? I find it hard to believe you have a normal ability to reproduce. Or rather, I could almost believe you do it by splitting in two.”

“Eh heh. Then how about we try it out?”

Yes.

What was the White Queen on a fundamental level?

“Now, now. Let’s have some fun, brother☆ …And if you refuse, I’ll exterminate every last human in the area.”

Her tone was light, but that only made it more frightening.

Given her power, it would actually be harder for her to *not* destroy the world.

That was why Kyousuke did not hesitate to abandon his principles and his pride.

“That would be a shame.”

“?”

“If you went on a rampage like that, the Ferris wheel would stop running and we wouldn’t be able to ride it together.”

The White Queen’s smile froze on her face.

“Y-you mean…you would let me…ride on the Ferris wheel…with you!?”

“Yes, assuming an Unexplored-class doesn’t go on an apocalyptic rampage that breaks the Ferris wheel from its supporting pillar.”

“Wait. Please wait. Um, uh, to ride a Ferris wheel together is for a young boy and girl to spend time together in a small, private room, right?”

“No one has managed to figure out how old you really are. The theory that you drifted in from *the other side* at the birth of history is pretty popular, but there are other theories that you were born the instant the Third Summoning Ceremony was created, that you were born this very instant and the past is being overwritten to match, or that you’ve secretly existed since before the world was created. And you’re such a singularity that you could probably fit any one of those.”

“Brother, you are getting off topic!! Are you trying to tease me!?”

“Let’s just say you don’t see many people riding the Ferris wheel to look at the scenery.”

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh☆☆☆”

The White Queen pressed her small palms against her cheeks and trembled as her entire face grew red.

“If it’s that distressing, we don’t have to do it.”

“What are you talking about!? You know exactly what I meant, don’t you!? You sweet brother!! So let’s go get in line! No, let’s destroy the line to get on right away!”
“Again, go on a rampage and it will stop running.”
“Th-the vessel at my core right now is a middle-aged man, but will you still flirt with me!?”
“C’mon, you’re getting in everyone’s way.”
With that, the White Queen took up her position at the end of the line.
It was a horribly surreal sight.
“Is this really something to get so excited about?”
“My, my. You just don’t understand girls, brother. Besides, I’d be happy even in a sea of blood as long as I’m with you.”
“I’m not that great.”
“Any human would have their gears shifted out of place to a certain extent if they reached me. You are no exception there. If you had never met me, you would not have ended up ‘like that’.”
She giggled with a smile indescribable by human words. It was not quite fascinating and not quite bewitching.
“But your gears aren’t bad. While other people’s will spin fruitlessly, yours alone stimulate my heart and draw out parts of me I never knew were there. …What else could I call this but love?”
“You’re imagining it,” spat out Kyousuke. “The Shiroyama Kyousuke standing in front of you and the Shiroyama Kyousuke in your mind are just too different. The person you picture in your head only exists in your heart. I can’t have you expecting that from me.”
She only giggled some more at those words.
It was said that love is blind, but the foundation of that was empty and unbelievable.
“You really haven’t changed, brother. If you’re willing to run all over the place to save a complete stranger, you should keep your eyes on me alone.”
“I’m not sure how you reach that conclusion.”
“If you became mine, it would eliminate about half of the world’s chaos.”
“…”
“Eh heh heh. It is truly wonderful that you don’t just agree to that. That’s the brother I know. I yearn for you because I cannot make you mine so easily. Supposedly, *romance in this world brings the most happiness in the time leading up to the confession*.”
“And what in the world are you doing? Just as this mysterious Guard of Honor shows up, I find you cheerfully supporting them. It’s not like you have any real attachment to that method.”
“Hmm. I just want to be with you, brother. Whether that’s for a single moment or for all eternity. It’s essentially the same either way.”
“Don’t you take issue with accepting help from a group that’s willing to blow away the entire world for something like that?”

“Ah ha ha. Your original was the fairy’s spring. That was a wonderful thing. There was no waste in the structure or functioning and it was just so lovely. …That splendid item demonstrated just how you viewed us Materials.”
“What part of a dangerous item that endlessly summoned Materials into this world is ‘splendid’? I was right to destroy it myself.”
“Oh, dear. You’re hopeless, brother.” The White Queen smiled happily. “You’re always like this. When faced with a situation where you can only save one hundred people, you forcibly save two hundred, which produces a new conflict. You give no thought to the remaining oxygen, the remaining food, or the number of lifeboats. You simply save everyone before your eyes. …Have you found the perfect world? Have you become the ruler of the world? You’ve done enough to earn that title, and yet I feel like you’re still nothing more than a rabbit traversing a world of chaos.”
She continued with joy in her voice.
“You caused that secret war where Materials briefly overflowed into this world and mankind nearly went extinct, but that was no different. You saw us being summoned and used as mere ‘Material’, so you *wanted to treat us like people just like you*, right?”
“I was wrong,” spat out the boy who likely held a legend great enough to truly stand alongside the White Queen. “I was wrong for so very, very long. I’m probably still wrong now. I know that. But even so, I couldn’t ignore the voices of those sinking into the bog. I don’t do this because of any strength. I’m being driven by the weakness that keeps me from accepting defeat, tragedy, pain, despair, or loss.”
“Perhaps so.” The White Queen sounded cheerful. “I can let the world live or die with a single fingertip, but I don’t have any intention at all of carrying that burden. I might hear a scream or the cries of death, but so what? An individual just has to take responsibility for their own life. This world’s custom is to let individuals deal with the misfortune and tragedies brought about by their own decisions, right? I see no reason to feel the slightest twinge of responsibility.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke could not help but laugh at that.
Yes. This was what it meant to be the strongest. Setting aside whether she was right or not, the White Queen was definitely stronger than anyone else in this world.
“We’ll have to agree to disagree here,” he said.
“Are you sure?”
“But there is no compromise with actions born of weakness. You need to remember that. They say a cornered rat will bite a cat. …Well, just so you know, I’m feeling pretty cornered right now. Enough that I can’t smile and insist we play fair and square.”
“That’s fine with me. Everyone is free to use the power they hold.”
“I will save Meinokawa Higan. I promised I would, so I swear to you I’ll protect her.”
“Is mentioning another girl’s name a small form of resistance?”

“No, if I was going to harass you, I would put a little more effort into it.” He snapped his fingers. “By the way, the sign says the Ferris wheel has about a thirty minute wait, but how long do you have until your time limit?”
“Eh? You!? T-toying with a maiden’s pure heart will earn you some legitimate divine punish-...ksssssshhhhhh!!!???”
The Artificial Sacred Ground and the White Queen vanished.
The middle-aged vessel collapsed to the ground and Kyousuke vanished into the crowd once more.
He had driven her off without fighting.
And it was now time to resume his efforts to save Meinokawa Higan.

Part 5

A heavy silence filled the guest room of Aika’s apartment.
Meinokawa Renge, Aika, and Lu Niang Lan were the only ones there. No, technically maid-outfit Higan was sleeping in the luxurious bed, but she was completely unconscious and thus so inhuman she nearly did not count. She had no presence and seemed more like a decoration.
She had not woken up since then and that succinctly indicated how dangerous her situation was.
“I lost my composure before.” Renge slowly inhaled as if switching mindsets. “But please let me check on Higan’s state again. I want an accurate knowledge of her state to think about what comes next.”
“Well, anything’s fine as long as it doesn’t end up *like before*.”
Swimsuit Girl Aika’s quiet response held a tone of warning.
Renge groaned.
“S-sorry.”
“Now, now. Squeezing any harder isn’t going to get anything more out of her. Suicide and revenge generally are based in escapism. If that girl is saying she won’t try for a heroic death anymore, then why not go with that?”
Lu Niang Lan casually sided with Renge and Aika grabbed a hand light from the bedside table. Instead of a light bulb or LEDs, it had a fifteen centimeter fluorescent light in the side. Plus, the fluorescent light was not a normal one.
“You said that’s different from a black light, right?”
“It doesn’t cause cancer, so don’t worry. It isn’t a scientific issue. … Basically, it’s important to view this from a ‘different viewpoint’. And light from a different wavelength is a convenient way of doing that,” explained

the Modified China Dress Beauty. “We probably need to remove your sister’s clothes to see this. Should we do that for you?”
“…! I’ll do it!! …How does this thing work? The top doesn’t seem to have any buttons… H-how are maid outfits made anyway!?”
“There’s a zipper on the back. It’s an apron dress, so it’s just a type of dress.”
“Why do you know so much about this?”
“Block C is all about movies and kung fu. You have no idea how many costumes I’ve worn for different campaigns.”
With some difficulties, Renge removed her sister’s maid outfit. Moving the unconscious form required more strength than she had expected, so it really was a kind of physical labor.
After she removed the clothing, she must have been filled with embarrassment and guilt because she pushed the removed clothing around the unconscious girl’s waist and chest.
“Could you not stare at Higan so much?”
“I have no interest in seeing anyone but Onii-chan naked.”
Aika clapped her hands twice and the room’s lights slowly went out. A thick light-blocking curtain covered the window, so the room was as dark as a home theater.
Then an unhealthy bluish light came from the hand light Aika held.
There should have been a slender girl lying there. The light should have reflected off her fine white skin like ceramic and she should have glowed like the moon in the night sky.
However, the dark blue marks covering Meinokawa Higan’s entire body were so vivid the three watching could almost hear them oozing.
Her body had the coloration of rotting fruit.
It covered about half of her body and the extreme white of her skin only caused that “decomposition” to stand out all the more to Renge’s eyes.
Simply changing their viewpoint was enough to see this. The “truth” hidden behind the normal light of day was anything but beautiful.
Renge had known it would be like this.
She really had, but the sight was still enough to shake her mind.
She gulped.
“There’s even more than before.”
“Time has passed without finding a fundamental solution, so of course it has.”
“And it’s *12:30* now, so it spread this much in just four hours.”
Even now, Higan’s life was being worn away.
The spread of that dark blue color visualized that life.

Part 4

“This is it.”
At noon, Modified China Dress Beauty Lu Niang Lan spoke bluntly with a spoonful of her homemade fried rice soup in her mouth.
Her empty hand held a pair of tweezers with something sharp in their metal grasp. Her blue eyes viewed a strange object that looked like a pure white needle only a few millimeters long. Investigating its composition with a centrifugal separator would likely only receive an error.
“I’ve finally got a sample. …Honestly, these things are all intertwined like some kind of puzzle ring.”
It was not a substance that existed on the planet earth.
It may have been most accurate to call it a piece torn from the White Queen’s body.
“Having more than three thousand of these embedded throughout a human body is like a nightmare. And none of them burst a major blood vessel or organ. …It’s like an iron maiden.”
It was obvious where the object had come from: Meinokawa Higan, the girl sleeping in the guest room bed.
Lu Niang Lan had never heard of someone ending up with these symptoms after letting the White Queen use their body. However, this was the Queen they were talking about. It would hardly be surprising if she could easily cheat by twisting the rules that summoners relied on to add in new rules she made up on the spot.
The White Queen had the absolute power necessary for that.
Lu Niang Lan focused on the small digital voice recorder sitting next to her bowl of fried rice soup.
“The countless objects are applying pressure to Meinokawa Higan’s blood vessels and organs like tiny clips. Removing them all surgically by the time limit would be impossible. …I’m sure the White Queen calculated it out that way. And rushing their removal could easily lead to her death.”
She took a sip of jasmine tea.
After wetting her lips, she tossed the object held by the pincers into a small bottle.
“This is exactly what we suspected, but it looks like defeating the White Queen within the time limit is the only way of saving Meinokawa Higan. Defeating the Queen herself will also erase the more than three thousand objects from the world. It’s exactly the worst case scenario we expected. How boring.”
Higan’s life would be eaten away, but there would be no noticeable symptoms until just before her death. In other words, she would feel no pain. The White Queen had left Shiroyama Kyousuke’s vessel with him, which implicitly told him to come to her.
She had given him a chance so she could enjoy this.
“The question is whether a normal summoning ceremony will be any use against the White Queen when she can move around freely without the support of a summoner or vessel. After all, she stands at the peak of all

Materials. She's the strongest even among the Unexplored-class. No matter which sound range you choose or how powerful you build your Material, the White Queen might be able to end it all with a single gesture."
The situation was hopeless.
The White Queen's insane love (or illusion thereof) sent her after Shiroyama Kyousuke, but that very insanity meant his safety was not guaranteed. Just like a friendly bear might kill a human while simply playing around, the White Queen could not control herself in front of Kyousuke.
"I can see what drove her sister Renge that far."
The Modified China Dress Beauty scooped up a spoonful of fried rice soup and spoke her personal opinion into the digital voice recorder.
"But I still think she has to be insane to try to get an unlicensed doctor to remove all of her own organs and give them to her sister to replace these infected ones."

Part 3

As soon as he heard the term "unlicensed doctor", Shiroyama Kyousuke ran out from Aika's apartment. The digital clock on the Ferris wheel's main support said it was *10:30 AM*.
"Well, there's nothing we can do for her sister, so I understand wanting to try anything. But if she shows up uninvited with an Ultra-C difficulty request she'll probably just be kicked out."
Lu Niang Lan was (abnormally) knowledgeable on the subject and she had that to say, but Kyousuke had different expectations.
Renge and Higan were twin sisters.
As their genetic information was so very similar, the compatibility of their organs would be overwhelmingly high.
And Higan was suffering due to the pressure that the fragments of the White Queen were placing on her blood vessels and organs.
Simply put, if they had a full set of replacement organs, Higan could be saved without a clash with the White Queen.
However, that would mean…
"Dammit!!"
He ran. He sometimes even jumped down from one giant bridge to another as a shortcut to get him to his destination as quickly as possible.
Fortunately, he did not need to search at random.
Lu Niang Lan had told him the name of the "merchant" she had told Renge about.

Block C had been built to recreate a film set modeled after an outsider's view of a Chinatown. If an unlicensed doctor was lurking there, they had likely been drawn in by the *unrealistic* image of the place.
He caught a glimpse of the unique shrine maiden outfit mixed into the usual crowd of colorful costumes.
He approached from behind and grabbed her slender shoulders. Before she had time for surprise, he dragged her into a nearby alley and slammed her back against the building wall.
"Do you really understand what you're trying to do here!?" he yelled at close range.
The girl's shoulders shook and she seemed to shrink down like a small animal.
But even as the boy held her against the wall, Renge glared back at him.
"This is the only way."
She was forcing out the words.
What did that mean? It likely meant she had been properly weighing her own life on the scales.
She had worried over this so much that she had lost sight of the correct answer.
"We're up against skilled summoners led by the ultimate White Queen and no Material can defeat that monster!! There's no way we can defeat the White Queen in just a few hours to remove those three thousand objects from Higan's body. So what else can we do but give up on that direct method!?"
"Even if you're twins, you can't skip past the tests as a shortcut to the surgery. You have to test for compatibility, infectious disease, immunosuppressants, and more. Organ transplants aren't the same as replacing a clock's gears. And I can tell just from looking at your hair and eyes that you're fraternal twins. Unlike identical twins, you have different genetic sequences, so you'd have to start at the very, very beginning with a blood test. There's simply no way you could complete all of the surgeries before the time limit."
Renge smiled thinly after listening to all that.
"I wouldn't be so sure."
"What?"
"Higan and I aren't just twins."
He did not know what she meant.
He was caught off guard, so she brushed off his hands. But not to run away.
She opened the neck of her shrine maiden outfit to show him something.
He assumed dazzlingly white skin would reach his eyes.
He was not wrong about that.
But a moment later, Meinokawa Higan *opened* her chest at the center of her ribs.
"…Eh?"

Shiroyama Kyousuke had seen plenty of psychedelic worlds, but his thoughts briefly ground to a halt.
The ribs that opened like a strange umbrella or flower were made of wood polished to an amber color. The contents were far removed from soft masses of dark red. There were shells shaped like the different organs, but they did not look alive. They looked more like handmade leather bags. They pulsated, but there was no heartbeat or mechanical noises.
The gears moved so smoothly they produced no noise. That indicated the skill put into their construction more than any craftsman’s signature could. He recalled some useless trivia about western automata being created by clockmakers.
“What is…this…?”

“It’s known as the Joruri Method. Although after creating something that looks and talks just like a human, I’m guessing they were hesitant to directly call it a toy or a machine.”
There was a somewhat self-deprecating tone to her answer.
And she kept her bizarre internal structure exposed all the while.
“Didn’t you find it odd?” asked Renge with her chest truly “opened”. “Could a lone summoner separated from her vessel really escape an organization like Guard of Honor so easily? Could I really do that if I had become nothing but a normal human?”
He could not definitely say she could not.
Take Lu Niang Lan of Illegal for example. That Perfect Dragon hated the summoning ceremony and exterminated skilled summoners entirely on her own, so she might be able to do it.
But it would have been impossible for Shiroyama Kyousuke himself.
He might have been able to lose them for a short time, but he would have ultimately needed to rely on a vessel and Material.
Even Alice (with) Rabbit would need that.
“But…”
His tone made it clear he still could not believe what he was seeing.
“What even are you? I’ve never heard of a wholly artificial summoner. For one thing, the summoner and the Material vanish from all cameras and sensors while the Incense Grenade is in effect. No unmanned weapon or missile should be able to see them.”
That was why manned weapons like the Repliglass soldiers were still used even if they could not directly combat the Material. With the exception of primitive optical devices like glasses and binoculars, anything beyond the naked eye was useless as one’s eyes or ears.
And yet…
“My family has long worked in this field.” Renge, who existed outside that assumption, readily answered. “Repliglass is modeled after insects and other animals, but you’ve heard that it was originally developed as a container for the White Queen, haven’t you? This is the same. Before Repliglass became widespread, we secretly built Joruri Method vessels. We originally specialized in *doll funerals*, but after we gained an interest in machines that moved on their own…well, I guess you could say the hunter became the hunted. …The ideal form was to have a human summoner and a Joruri Method vessel to control the Material with no interference whatsoever.”
That was the ideal form, but in reality, Renge was the summoner and Joruri Method while Higan was the vessel and a human.
Or was Meinokawa Higan also not human?
“That girl is human. That is why she has suffered through so many unreasonable things.”
“?”

“Even if it was through an irregular method, the Meinokawa family found its social significance by producing stable and skilled summoners. I was the machine produced later and Higan was originally the only heir. Now do you see the problem she faced?”
“I do. No inborn talent is needed to become a summoner, but it is to become a vessel. But then those with that talent can’t become a summoner.”
The Artificial Sacred Ground created by an Incense Grenade was basically an area where it was a little easier for ghosts to make an appearance. The vessel acted as a contact point, so if they tried to be a summoner themselves, the Material would hijack their body. The very fact that a pair was needed for the summoning ceremony proved that the vessel needed the support of a third party to maintain control.
An excellent vessel was a type of genius.
But she had not been given the opportunity to use that genius in the small Meinokawa world.
“Blonde hair and blue eyes. I’d thought you seemed pretty different for twins…”
“Did you think we were a half or quarter non-Japanese? She is entirely Japanese-made. She just ended up ‘like that’ as they messed with her body, trying to medically remove the trait that allows the Material to possess her.”
That attempt had presumably failed.
The trait had only been partially removed and yet she was still such an excellent vessel.
So how great a vessel had she been originally? Kyousuke recalled how famous ukiyoe pictures had been balled up as cushioning for decorative plates during the Meiji period. That was exactly what had happened to Meinokawa Higan’s life.
“That is why I was made.” The Joruri Method in a shrine maiden outfit spoke quietly. “The skeletal structure, arrangement of organs, and other basic features of Higan’s body were combined into the ‘ideal Meinokawa Higan’ that the entire family felt should have been born. That is Meinokawa Renge. That is me. And that is why I’m treated like the elder twin despite being made later.”
That explained some things.
Kyousuke had never heard of a third party hijacking the contract between a summoner and vessel, but this meant that the connection between Renge and Higan was not normal. Had that irregularity been caused by the powerful bond created by a being that did not exist in the natural world?
“I…still have a hard time believing this. Higan showed no sign of hiding something like this. She even ran from safety and toward almost certain doom to save you. If she had been forced down by you and covered in hatred, she never would have done that.”
“She…” Renge hesitated to speak, but she did so anyway. “She does not know the truth. Or rather, she can’t see it. After all, I’m the ideal form of Meinokawa Higan. Her hair and eyes may have changed, but I might as well

be her mental image of what ‘Meinokawa Higan’ looks like. She must see a truer version of the Meinokawa Sisters when she looks in my face than when she looks in a mirror. …That is why we are twin sisters even if we look so different.”
Summoner and vessel.
Ideal and reality.
Older sister and younger sister.
It had all been flipped upside down, so what had Meinokawa Renge thought while living alongside Higan? She was an artificial creation, she was being used by humans, and she had gained trust based on a false understanding. The more Higan smiled her way, the less she would have been able to accept it.
Even so, she had refused to run away and she had continued to protect Higan. That was why she was here now.
And that was why she had made the decision to throw away her own life.
“Thanks to this, the normal theories of organ transplants don’t apply.” Renge kept the inside of her opened chest on display. “We don’t have to think about rejection or immunosuppressants. I was created as the ideal Meinokawa Higan, so her body will accept my artificial organs better than any others. …We can make it in time this way. Defeating the White Queen might be unrealistic, but we still have a way to save her.”
She would protect her sister.
She had lived with only that in her heart and it had led to this decision. That desire may have saved her as well. Kyousuke did not know how many years it had been since Meinokawa Renge had been created, but she had been burdened with a definite purpose from the moment of her birth and that purpose came from the destruction of the dreams held by the very person who idolized her. How could she have remained calm when faced with that?
So saving her sister may have also saved herself.
But…
“That won’t work.”
Her feelings, her resolve, her determination, her devotion, and her love had all led to this dark red conclusion, so could he really say they were right?
“Why not? I’m a Joruri Method machine while she’s human. Protecting her is my only reason to continue functioning. The optimal answer is right before my eyes. We don’t need to bet on the ridiculous possibility of defeating the White Queen. I can save her like this! So…!!”
“That may be logical. When weighing the value of your lives, maybe we should choose the human life. But Higan told me something in her own words. When you were separated by that battle at the harbor, she could have abandoned her sister and hidden in safety on her own, but she said something else!”
“What are you talking about!?”

“She said that isn’t what she meant when she asked for ‘help’!! And then she returned all on her own! She returned to the battlefield to bring you back!!”
Renge stopped breathing.
Her despairing thoughts came to a stop.
And Kyousuke’s shouted words slipped in through that gap.
“Higan was separated from you back then. Death was approaching her too and most anyone would honestly speak the ugly thoughts deep inside them. But then! At the very, very end!! When she spoke the thoughts deep inside her, it was a desire to save you!! So can you still say that throwing away your own life would save Higan!?”
“That’s…that’s only because she doesn’t know the truth. That’s only because she can’t see reality! She’s being deceived!! I mean…I’m just a Joruri Method…I’m just a machine…and I stole everything from her…!!”
“So what? Even if she doesn’t know the truth of this world, I’ll still follow the dream in her eyes. It might be silly, but that resolve came from her heart. She spoke the ‘cursed words’ to me, so I’ll help her. I may be reluctant and I might not gain anything from this, but I’m not going to accept a half-assed conclusion now that I’ve agreed to this!! What about you? After coming this far and protecting her for so long, are you going to accept an imperfect conclusion in the very, very end!?”
“…”
She fell silent.
Renge fell silent.
She too had to know what the most ideal answer was. She had decided to be Meinokawa Higan’s sister, so she was not a machine that could only obey her source code and she was not a shell of a human that could only repeat the same action again and again after losing during the summoning ceremony. But she had realized how difficult it would be to achieve that, so she had fled to another answer.
She could not do it. The Meinokawa Sisters could not do it even if they worked together.
But…
“Say it,” said Shiroyama Kyousuke. “I will defeat the White Queen myself. That will remove everything eating into Meinokawa Higan. I will use everything available to me, I will cheat in every way I can, and I will sweep aside everyone who stands in my way. Freedom Award 902, Alice (with) Rabbit, swears it. …So say the cursed words. That will complete this.”
Meinokawa Renge remained silent with her head lowered.
Finally, she bit her lip a little. She closed up the unnatural and grotesquely lacking contents of her body. Now that she was just a girl once more, she slowly gathered all of her courage and spoke the decisive, triggering words.
“…lp…us.”
At first, it sounded more like an escaping breath than a voice.
It slowly but surely grew into the words that could shake the human heart.

“If you’re going to say all that, then help us.”
A certain tone filled her scratchy words.
It was a heated emotion. It was a raw torrent of mixed emotions that could not be easily identified as any single one.
“Higan doesn’t have much longer. I don’t have time to be picky about my methods! The White Queen is hopelessly cruel and powerful! She’s so frightening that not even gathering up all the summoners around here would be enough! In fact, I can’t even break through the protection of Guard of Honor that serves her! I might rely on luck or pray for a divine miracle, but the White Queen reigns beyond even the Divine-class! So! When I find myself utterly helpless and sink into the bog of despair, no final prayer is going to conveniently solve everything! It won’t do a damn thing!”
Renge’s carefully-prepared words were falling apart.
Her tone was shaking and sobs mixed into her voice.
“But…”
At some point, her tear ducts had opened.
“If you’re going to brag that you can make the impossible possible…”
She cried.
Her face grew red, she did not wipe away the clear liquid dripping down her cheeks, and she threw her words at him from close range.
“If you think you can help us, then prove it!!!!!”
Shiroyama Kyousuke narrowed his eyes little.
The individual before his eyes was only a girl. It did not matter if she was a Joruri Method or an artificially-created summoner. She was nothing more than a girl driven to absolute desperation in her desire to save her sister.
He did not need to give it much thought. He did not need to say anything grand. All of that would be entirely superfluous.
There was only one thing he had to say.
He only had to make the one announcement to the crying girl before his eyes.
“As you wish.”
The contract had been updated.
The giant gears that moved Alice (with) Rabbit heavily yet quietly began to turn once more.

Part 2

Shiroyama Kyousuke was curled up in the hallway of Aika's apartment with his back pressed against the wall. The female announcer on the living room TV said it was *nine in the morning*.
Aika and Lu Niang Lan were checking on Meinokawa Higan's condition in the guest room.
He had screwed up.
He had put his partner and vessel in danger.
——It was Meinokawa Renge that summoned the White Queen, not you.
(…That isn't an excuse.)
——You did not know that twins could ignore the contract between summoner and vessel to seize control.
(That isn't an excuse.)
——If you had been able to settle things with Golden Luxury there, this would not have happened.
(That isn't an excuse!!!!!)
For one thing, combat never went as planned. If there were rules he did not know about, that was his fault for not learning about them. This was not a sport held in a ring, so it was not necessarily going to remain one-on-one from beginning to end.
That was the most basic lesson.
The smallest things had built up and the discrepancy they created had bared their fangs against his vessel instead of him.
"What is this Alice (with) Rabbit crap…?"
He heard a low growl.
He glanced over and saw the five meter white liger that Aika used as a sofa sluggishly approaching him.
He did not move in the slightest.
"Stop this. I don't have it in me to deal with you right now."
The beast did not understand human language.
It moved its giant face in close enough for him to feel its warm breath on his own face.
Then he spoke more succinctly.
"Stop."
The word pierced the silence.
Only once he spoke it did he realize what had happened.
That cross between a lion and a white tiger, that king of beasts that did not exist in the natural world, had pressed its stomach against the wooden flooring as it cowered down like a child after being yelled at.
When he saw the giant beast trembling, Shiroyama Kyousuke sighed a little.
"Sorry. I should have known that shouting at you wasn't going to help."
He held out his hand and the white liger licked his fingertips with its large, rough tongue. He then reached an arm around the neck of the beast as it hesitantly approached once more.
"It's okay. It really is. Thanks for worrying about me."

A nearby door opened. It led to the guest room. Swimsuit Girl Aika stepped out with a dumb look on her face.
“Onii-chan, if you were craving your little sister’s scent, you just had to hug the real deal. Or are you a true genius who’s only satisfied with the scent she leaves on things?”
“How’s Higan?”
His short, monotone question elicited a shrug from Aika.
“That China Dress is using acupuncture to slow down the progress, but it’s really only buying us a little more time. She says we’ll be lucky to get even a few extra hours out of it.”
“I see,” was all Kyousuke said.
But someone was dissatisfied with that exchange.
“What is with all of you?”
It was Meinokawa Renge, Higan’s twin sister.
“By the White Queen, you mean *the* White Queen, right!? She’s the top of the Unexplored-class who gathers cult-like popularity from Government, Illegal, and Freedom. Everyone knows and yearns for that Material, from the lowest rookie to the most skilled expert!! She’s the collection of benevolence, symbol of holiness, and anthropomorphism of radiance that Higan prayed to every single day!! So how…how does that lead to her body being eaten into like this? I’ve never heard of anything like this before!!”
Meinokawa Higan was unconscious and nearly half her body was covered in a dark blue mark.
Once it covered her entire body, she would die.
This was happening due to the simple fact that the White Queen had resided inside her body.
But at the same time…
“In a way, the White Queen is the most famous Material in the world, isn’t she? It’s true you don’t often get a chance to summon her in a real battle, but some of the top ranked summoners have to have summoned her in the past, right? And if that led to their vessel being eaten away from within and dying, there would be rumors of that, wouldn’t there!? And yet…!!”
“There’s no meaning to it,” spat out Kyousuke. “If you summoned the White Queen like normal, it wouldn’t lead to this. And while that was an abnormal situation since you forcibly stole the contract from me, I doubt that was the reason for this.”
“Then…!!”
“She’s *in love with being in love.* There’s no more to it than that,” he decisively stated. “She’ll keep running forever even though she doesn’t know where the goal is. She’ll destroy an entire country or the entire world without a second thought if it’s to fulfill a desire she thought up on the spot. …Creating this time limit inside Meinokawa Higan was to prevent me from escaping her. That’s all. There’s no grand reason, singularity, or law behind this. That really is all that there is to it.”
“You’re kidding…right?”

Renge started mumbling, but she did not stop there.
She continued in a low groan.
“I can’t believe this. I saw it with my own eyes and I still can’t believe it. I mean, isn’t the White Queen the symbol of justice held up by summoners the world over? She’s basically an indulgence we hold up to prove that we’re just in using her. And yet…she talks on and on like that and she grows violent when she doesn’t like something? That’s…that’s…”
The White Queen was the legendary Material longed for by every summoner. She held the greatest power within the Unexplored-class that lay beyond the Divine-class.
After seeing her for herself, Renge could not reconcile that with what she had seen.
“Do you know the White Queen’s official name?”
“The ‘White’ Queen who Wields the Sword of Unsullied Truth (iu – nu – fb – a – wuh – ei –kx – eu – pl – vjz). For summoners, it’s like a children’s counting song. I think you’d be harder pressed to find one who didn’t know it.”
“Now what about the opposite? What’s the name of the Material every summoner hates?”
“?”
“Taboos one and three. The Black Maw that directly kills any summoner that makes a fatal mistake.”
“Oh, you mean the Black Maw that Swallows All (nu – lp – eu – bf – zuh – ei – jkv – iu – a – xw). You never need to summon it yourself, so there’s no real point in memorizing the letters, though.”
Kyousuke stared intently over at Renge as he continued.
“Rearrange the letters for those names and compare them again.”
“Huh? Wait a second…”
As she did the work in her head, her face froze over.
Kyousuke gave the answer
“They both have twenty-one letters and those letters are identical. They’re made from the exact same number of low, middle, and high sounds. …In other words, the famous White Queen and the infamous Black Maw are one and the same.”
With that in mind, one could guess what was hidden behind that pure white smile.
She was not something that would obey mankind.
She was capable of selfishly tricking people into worshipping her even as she feigned obedience while consuming countless summoners.
She was capable of fully sealing such great evil behind her smile.
A god did not serve man.
Man served the gods.
That should have been the proper way of things, but it looked so twisted due to the great evil at its core.

“What is she?” asked Meinokawa Renge as if digging down to the heart of the matter. “What is the White Queen?”
Kyousuke had a simple answer.
“If I knew that, this would be so much easier.”

Part 1

“Oh. My. Dear. Brother?”
At just past eight in the morning, the White Queen smiled thinly in the Artificial Sacred Ground created by an Incense Grenade in the station-front plaza covered in the wreckage of the fallen bridge.
“I hate to do this when we finally have a chance to see each other again, but I will be leaving for the time being. Still, I know that you are at these coordinates. That alone was well worth the trip.”
“What…are you thinking?”
“I’m always thinking about nothing but you, year-round.”
“You are not thinking about me. You’re only in love with being in love.”
“What’s the difference?”
“What you have is only an illusion.”
“Hmm, this sounds like the beginning of a love story I’d want to listen to all night long, but the Artificial Sacred Ground is about at its limit. Complaining any more would only ruin the mood.”
“…”
“Glare at me all you want, but is there anything you can do against a Material without a vessel? Hee hee. Not that you would have much of a chance against the peak of the Unexplored-class even at your best.”
That was the truth.
His vessel, Meinokawa Higan, was currently giving form to the White Queen. Plus the contract had been torn from his grasp just before she had been summoned. He had no power at the moment. Not even the standard protective circle. If she so much as flicked him on a whim, it would probably tear off his head.
“How long are you going to keep this up?”
“As long as it takes to make you mine. Yes, I adore you so much I wish I could *snatch you away* right this instant. But this vessel is just so frail. If I ignore the Artificial Sacred Ground and extend the time limit too much, there might be no saving her.”
“What…?”

“You’ll know just what I mean if you look into things afterwards. I would prefer you didn’t look at another girl’s skin too much, but motivating you is more important. …But if it arouses even an ounce of lust inside you, I will physically wring this vessel out like an old rag.”
The sound of static filled their surroundings.
The ten minute time limit was up.
“Oh, right. If you wish to kill me and save a certain someone, I recommend starting by smashing Guard of Honor’s rather amusing ambitions. To be honest, I am currently somewhat separated from the Blood-Sign style summoning ceremony. Although their Sewn Realm Summoning isn’t very good, so I can exist in two places at once like this. But it is still based on the Sewn Realm Summoning, so you need to destroy both the system supporting it and that version of me if you want to eliminate the ‘change’.”
The details of the White Queen’s outline blurred, but she continued speaking with a smile.
“My time is up. Until we meet again, brother. I will be waiting until the end of the world.”
“Do you really think I’ll do what you want?”
“You will. I guarantee it. 100%.”
She was smiling.
That alone would have been lovely, but she spoke with an endlessly toxic elegance in her voice.
“After all, you are Alice (with) Rabbit. You are the great hero who will save two hundred when you should only be able to save one hundred. With human techniques, I expect you can’t extend the limit past *seven this evening*. Once you notice what has been done and find a life will be lost, you will run to the dark side of the moon if necessary.”
That was all.
The ten minutes were up, the mysterious Artificial Sacred Ground dispersed, and the White Queen vanished.
All that remained were the scars of destruction and the summoners and vessel she had selfishly beaten up.
Plus Meinokawa Higan who collapsed limply despite not having used an extended Chain.
She would die at seven o’clock.
The White Queen had said so, so it would not be a lie.

Secret Stage 02

“So this is the ‘item’ in question.”
It was a gorgeous reception room decorated with gold and jewels far too gaudy for a supposed monastery.
An extremely large man had been the one to speak. If he had told people he had noble blood, no one would have believed it. Even in the modern day, he would have sounded more credible introducing himself with a cutlass in hand and a pirate ship behind him. The butler waiting behind him further drew out the crude impression he gave people.
He was facing a small man.
This man almost looked like a little grey in a human costume. He had a smile on his face, but it showed as little emotion as a plastic doll being melted with a flame.
The alien spoke.
“The Bloodline Preservation Committee intends to regain all members of the proper Magentarain bloodline that has been so neglected for a variety of reasons and we intend to receive those members of the bloodline with the treatment they deserve.”
“Hmph.”
A young girl with reddish-blonde hair and white skin stood next to the alien. She looked like a doll, but that was not meant to disparage her. Her gorgeous dress and the sweet scent of her hair were proof that everything had been stripped away from her for the life that awaited her. All of the warm things that had made her who she was had been erased and then overwritten with the Magentarain name.
It was such a “warm welcome”, that it was surprising there had been no handcuffs or collars involved.
“The treatment they deserve? She’ll be kicked out of the main family’s line of succession either way. This is some illegitimate child that showed up out of the blue. Those purity-obsessed freaks won’t even treat her like a human being.”
“Perhaps, but she is still a Magentarain. No one can find any faults in her basic specs and she will do well in any field. …And that of course includes your world of the summoning ceremony, young master.”
“I’m not about to form a team.”
“Yes, but I believe there are still ways to use her for your purposes.” The alien grinned. “She can act as bait to draw out the enemy, she can use her position as a child to gather information, and she can simply act as a human shield. You could even use her as a sandbag to relieve stress. No one would care.”
“So you ‘saved her’ to make her expendable, did you?”
This was the truth behind the vast sums of money the Magentarain family spent sending agents around the world to search out ‘hidden blood’. They were not interested in saving those who shared their blood. Jealous wives wanted to see her cheating husband’s illegitimate family line destroyed. This was a “game” that nobles had played for centuries.

The large man cracked his neck once and stared at the “product”.
“What’s your name?”
“Whatever you decide to call her, be it Toy, Doll, or Device.”
“I wasn’t asking you,” he said lightly.
Immediately afterwards, a tremendous sound of destruction was followed by the alien flying easily five meters through the air.
He rolled along, taking out luxurious chairs and tables as he went, but the large man did not even glance that way. The butler behind him brought a hand to his forehead, but the large man once more asked the girl a low question.
“What’s your name?”
“A-Azalea…”
“I see. Hey, old man. Cancel your contract with me and make one with her. The kid apparently has promise as a summoner, so it wouldn’t hurt to give her a vessel.”
“What an odd thing to say. You would ask a faithful servant to leave his master? And surely you know how much pain those words will bring.”
“Of course this is going to be painful. This is our sin. Not just mine. Ours.”
“Honestly. You leave me no choice.”
The butler gave an exasperated shake of the head.
The young girl could not follow the conversation. She knew this supposedly had to do with her, but she felt like she had been left behind.
“Sorry about this,” said the large man. “Your life belongs to you. You can follow whatever path you want and join any world you want. I’ll give you this old man to take care of anything you might need, but you don’t have to rely on him. Just make sure you live a life you can be proud of. This isn’t about the Magentarain family. Go find the kind of happiness that won’t bring shame to the name of Azalea.”
That was all.
That noble girl never again met that large man.
And she had yet to come across a life she could be proud of.

Facts

- Even after Guard of Honor’s appearance, the three major powers are only monitoring the situation and cannot be expected to clean things up.
- Guard of Honor’s goal is a Sewn Realm Summoning of the White Queen. By binding a one-on-one contract with the White Queen,

they will become her first chosen servants and joyfully serve her as her priests or guard of honor. However, they have little chance of success and carelessly carrying out their plan could endlessly summon Materials into the world's seas around the White Queen, destroying modern society.

- The White Queen has no interest in Guard of Honor's actions.
- The Award "Loved by the White" is only given to those loved by the White Queen. It is a rare Award held only by Shiroyama Kyousuke.
- But in truth, the White Queen is only in love with being in love, so it is not really necessary for it to be Kyousuke in that position. (According to Shiroyama Kyousuke)
- Meinokawa Renge is the world's first fully artificial summoner known as a Joruri Method and she was created as the ideal version of Higan, using her skeletal structure and organ arrangement. That seems to be why she was able to hijack the contract between summoner and vessel.
- Meinokawa Higan will die if the White Queen is not defeated by 7:00 PM.
- Meinokawa Higan does not know this fact.

Stage 04: There’s No Meaning to It

「“わたくしはあにうえ以外には一ミリも興味がないものでして”」

「……誰の言葉だ?」

(Stage 04 Open 04/15 16:03)

ステージ04

意味なんかどこにもない

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“ ‘I haven’t the slightest interest in anything except you, brother.’ ”
“Who said that?”
There’s No Meaning to It
(Stage 04 Open 04/15 16:03)

Part 1

“I bind this covenant of blood in the name of The Spirit of Fluttering ‘Yellow’ Gills that Rules the Heavens (s – a – so – voz – tix – ei – yw – za), one of the Three which manage and guide the summoning ceremony. You are of human flesh with a proper heart and soul, yet from this moment onward, you shall be a limited vessel that can hold all things.”
“You shall be a lord of emptiness that uses the power filling you to at times bend the laws of this world.”
“So I shall prepare this vessel. I am a summoner, unable to leave the world of man, yet a symbol of haughty intellect that uses power from beyond the world of man to guide the world of man to the next age!!”
Shiroyama Kyousuke’s contract with Higan had been stolen in an irregular fashion, so he had restored it to its proper form.
He had already discussed this with her sister Renge.
“I think we would both be in agreement that we need to search for every possible means of saving her.”
“Get to the point.”
“Which one of us can make better use of Meinokawa Higan as a vessel? If you want to increase her odds of survival as much as possible, then I want you to hand her over to me.”
He felt that was an inhuman opinion.
He was basically telling her to butt out when her sister was in great need.
Even so, he forced it through.
That was why he was known as Alice (with) Rabbit.
“Fwahh… I-I’m finally back in my shrine maiden outfit.”
Below the countless crisscrossing bridges of Toy Dream 35, cruisers and boats were moored in the evening sunlight. There, Higan lightly patted the waist of her shrine maiden outfit.
To her, that was likely about as important as the fate of the world that hung in the balance
“B-but where are we going to sneak in? Guard of Honor’s headquarters is located in those staff-only passageways covering this city like a spider web,

right? Doesn't that mean any part of this thirty kilometer square city is a candidate?"
According to Aika, the passageways covered a combined total of three million kilometers. One could not cover all of that in a lifetime while wandering around randomly.
"There are entrances everywhere." Kyousuke did not sound worried. "And even if this looks like an over-the-top setup with a complex ceremonial process, it's really just a treasure hunting game set up by her and her love for being in love. There's no meaning to it. So I'm betting *the first place that comes to my mind will be the right place.* That's just how it's set up."
He did not need any obvious evidence.
His confidence came from the long time they had spent together.
"W-we have to do everything we can," said Higan. "They'll finish in three hours and then uncontrollable Materials will pour out, swallow up the people of this city, and wreak havoc on the entire world. We have to do something."
"Yes. But to be honest, fighting the White Queen is more than enough of a threat on its own. Going up against her at full power is more frightening than fighting a million summoners."
"The White Queen…"
"Is it still a shock?"
"Yes. Of course it is. But we have to do something… If the White Queen will really bring that kind of catastrophe, um, we can't just ignore it."
Higan sounded more sad than afraid, but that may have been because she did not directly remember the White Queen's violence.
She had managed to shake free of her dependence, but that likely had nothing to do with herself. It would have more to do with seeing the painful-looking injuries left on her sister's body.
"Fortunately, Guard of Honor's Sewn Realm Summoning is apparently full of holes. The White Queen's perfection is unstable and she might have a few extra vulnerabilities. It looks like there might be something we can take advantage of."
That was not a lie.
However, there was something Shiroyama Kyousuke was not telling Higan.
"This is the only way."
A certain girl had literally tried to chop up and sell her body to protect her family.
"Thanks to this, the normal theories of organ transplants don't apply."
She could have run away if she had wanted to. If she had given up on this one thing, she would have been free to live a completely different life. But out of those infinite possibilities, she had chosen death in order to protect her sister.
"Why not? I'm a Joruri Method machine while she's human. Protecting her is my only reason to continue functioning. The optimal answer is right

before my eyes. We don't need to bet on the ridiculous possibility of defeating the White Queen. I can save her like this! So…!!"
That was beautiful, but it had to be mistaken. Just like a sculpture that ignored proper anatomy in order to increase the apparent beauty, it was praiseworthy but wrong.
So Shiroyama Kyousuke had broken her heart for his own convenience. And he had drawn a certain word out of her.
"If you think you can help us, then prove it!!!!!"
"…"
Kyousuke lightly cracked his neck.
He shifted his focus from inward to outward.
"Now, let's get started."
"Wh-what exactly are we going to do? Guard of Honor is a collection of summoners powerful enough to face the aces of Government, Illegal, and Freedom head-on, right? And they even have a Repliglass army. A direct attack on them would turn into a real war, wouldn't it?"
"I have an idea."
Higan heard a thunk. It was the sound of Kyousuke lightly kicking something in the evening road.
She hesitantly looked down.
It was a Horseshoe Crab.
It was a cutting-edge amphibious Repliglass soldier with a giant hemisphere of armor on its back.
Including the tail, it was about four meters long. It was one of the things Kyousuke had fished up while scouting out their strength. An unarmed boy could not defeat that cutting-edge weapon covered in a shell and artificial muscles made of silicon. But if he threw an Incense Grenade into the center of the enemy formation, a great number of guards would notice and it would cause a huge commotion.
However, that had not been enough for Shiroyama Kyousuke to give up.
He had started by spotting a single Repliglass soldier carelessly moving out alone on the very edge of their patrol route. He had then walked right up to it and thrown the Incense Grenade *backwards*.
The Artificial Sacred Ground had opened with its outside edge just two meters ahead of Kyousuke. He accurately brought in that nearest Horseshoe Crab without including any of the other guards. The surprised target had tried to fight back with its close-range weaponry, but Kyousuke had already been automatically moved back to the center of the Artificial Sacred Ground. Then, as the Horseshoe Crab stared in confusion at the spot where its target had dodged with inhuman speed, he had used his Blood-Sign to summon the weakest and simplest Material and quickly defeated it.
He had dumped the defeated Horseshoe Crab into the ocean directly below the bridge and then collected and towed it away using the cruiser he had waiting in case he needed to flee.

It had been over in less than five seconds after the Artificial Sacred Ground had opened.
They would almost certainly have seen that two meter glowing cube from the outside, but it had only lasted five seconds, there was no report of an intruder or a battle, and searching the scene would turn up nothing.
A group that takes in so many summoners would first assume an Incense Grenade had gone off by accident. Of course, if they checked the reports of all the summoners working for Guard of Honor, they would eventually find out that no one had done that. However, it would take some time before that happened.
Finding a definite hole was easy, but checking to see if “no one did anything” required going through what every single report said and deciding if they were telling the truth or not.
“Either way, they’ll get suspicious as time goes on and this Horseshoe Crab doesn’t make its periodic reports. It doesn’t really matter if they figure it out sooner or later. We just have to get in before that.”
Kyousuke calmly answered Higan who looked worried.
She nervously peered at the unmoving Horseshoe Crab.
“There’s, um, a bunch of stuff underneath that shell, isn’t there? …I don’t know what it’s all called though.”
There was indeed a Gatling gun made for underwater use, a super-high temperature saber that reached temperatures of five or six thousand degrees using a plasma jet also made for underwater use, and amphibious guided weaponry. A specialist in that sort of thing would probably have been drooling if they saw all that cutting-edge technology, but that was not Kyousuke’s focus.
“So it’s completely reliant on the detachable visor during night battles. Infrared, ultraviolet, ultrasound visualization, and light amplification… It combines them all into a single grayscale image. It looks like a modified version of the Quad Motors CE-30.”
Summoners and Material did not appear on mechanical sensors when the Incense Grenade was in effect. The visor was detachable so they could switch between the naked eye and the mechanical sensors.
After checking over the equipment, Kyousuke grinned.
“I think we can use this.”
“H-how?”
“One: the advantage of numbers doesn’t really apply in summoner battles unless it’s a large battlefield like a desert or plain. If you can build up a high-level Material with a Chain, you can defeat all of the others that have to start from scratch.”
He bent another finger down as he continued.
“Two: Summoners can bend the laws of physics, but even they have to follow a few steps to summon a Material. To put that another way, they’re almost completely helpless if you can seal off those steps.”
At that point, he asked a sudden question.

“Just to be sure, you don’t have glaucoma, do you?”
“?”

Part 2

The place looked like giant ruins from the BCE period.
There were disaster-relief waterways that gathered the rainwater, subway tunnels, and passageways for buried high-voltage lines and high-speed communication lines. The underground area of this great city was a collection of cutting-edge technology, yet people viewed it just like ancient ruins.
In the end, the awed fear of giant structures beyond an individual’s understanding remained unchanged in the modern era.
Uniquely Selfless stood in one of those sealed areas *that overwhelmed everyone who saw it.*
She had already abandoned the name of Freedom Award 954, L.D. 250. She had also been a part of Government and Illegal in the past, but she had repeatedly abandoned her past to move ever onward and forward.
She had even lost the ability to think of those things as abandoned.
So she had nothing.
“Point 13: nothing to report.”
She was in her early twenties, her long hair was tied back, and she wore a cheap track suit. She wore no real makeup. Just like a shut-in who had forgotten how to interact with other human beings, she had lost any distinction between at-home clothes and outside clothes and she essentially wore pajamas year-round. Although it was impressive in a way that she could still attract others despite completely losing the ability to focus on herself as an individual.
“Do we really need to make these periodic reports, Uniquely Selfless?” she asked.
“How are we supposed to know who you’re talking to? Maybe we should have at least added numbers to the end.”
“It doesn’t matter who I’m talking to as long as I get the right answer.”
“I suppose that’s true.”
This was a giant tomb surrounded by thick concrete in every direction. Uniquely Selfless sat on a pile of construction materials and spoke with another Uniquely Selfless over her cellphone.
All the while, she looked down at the countless Repliglass soldiers, those giant bugs wriggling down below.

“Periodic reports are the standard for guards. We can’t rely on mechanical cameras and sensors when an Incense Grenade is active, so a report from a physical voice is all we can use.”
“Ha ha. But these phones are mechanical, aren’t they? We can’t use them if we’re swallowed up by an Artificial Sacred Ground.”
“Yes, but then we will notice the lack of periodic reports. We would be unable to detect a summoner’s attack if we only had you call in during an emergency.”
That textbook answer led Uniquely Selfless to briefly recall someone. However, she could not remember who they were or which of the three major powers they were from.
Everything from her past was simply placed under the category of “the past”. Both the living and the dead.
“Hey, who do you think will be first?”
“It doesn’t matter who.”
“Government, Illegal, and Freedom… None of them are functioning at the moment and none of them is a match for us. Out of the 450 we instructed, at least 70 of them rose to the higher 800s, so we can survive even a full-on war.”
Her use of the word “war” was no laughing matter.
By making Incense Grenades from wood and glass, they could be carried in secret and slip past metal detectors and searches. If anyone looked away for just a second, they would be completely forgotten. All cameras and sensors for defenses and guided weaponry were useless inside an Artificial Sacred Ground. With the protective circle, they were immune to all kinds of firepower. If they continued a Chain at length, they could continue their paranormal battle without resupplying.
Simply put, heading out with a party like this, they could reach the president of a great nation. Before the so-called “industry rules” had been created, wars meant to target and kill just the top commander had been quite common.
So to Uniquely Selfless, her enemy would be nothing more than someone who had disappeared into the past.
Whoever arrived first, it would be nothing more than someone whose name and face she could not remember.
A moment later, all of the lights went out at once.
The giant windowless structure felt like ancient ruins. Darkness filled every inch of the space, as if to remind her this was a thick concrete tomb.
At the same time, she heard a quiet yet solid sound. It came from the cellphone held to her ear, and it was the sound of the LCD backlight breaking. It seemed to have been pierced by something sharp, not hit by a blunt object.
With every light source gone, true darkness reigned.
She heard someone breathing nearby.

She reached for an Incense Grenade on reflex, but then she remembered something.
If she could not see her target with the naked eye, the Incense Grenade would not create an Artificial Sacred Ground.
Even with someone right in front of her eyes, there was nothing she could do if she could not see!
“Wait…”
She had not given any thought to this possibility she had buried in her past.

A dull sound burst out as killer intent rushed out to surround the entire area.
Kyousuke felt his enemy’s defeat through the Blood-Sign he had thrust out like a spear.
The summoner had been crushed.
But there was still the vessel and the countless Repliglass soldiers.
“(Hurry!!)”
He gestured to Higan and ran through the dark.
Yes, he gestured.
They did not need to defeat all of the enemy soldiers. Their top priority was reaching the deepest area where the White Queen’s Sewn Realm Summoning was being carried out. The two of them slipped past the Repliglass soldiers as they ran.
Those soldiers armed with cutting-edge weapons pulled down their visors for night-vision the instant their own vision went dark. They also turned their heads toward the footsteps.
But they could not “see” Kyousuke and Higan.
However, Kyousuke doubted this cheap trick would last for long.
“(We need to slip past as many as we can while this confusion lasts!! Unnecessary fighting will only use up what time we have!!)”
They moved from the giant stone tomb to a narrow passageway and ran down a stairway with a metal pipe railing forcibly attached. They ran into a few two meter Repliglass soldiers that resembled praying mantises or pill bugs on the way. Normally, they would have had difficulty with those monsters that could crush an armored car and dig through a concrete wall, but they slipped right past them and kept running. Their progress was oddly smooth.
They continued down, down, down, and down.
There were no windows and no sunlight reached them. Partially thanks to that, they gradually lost track of whether they were currently above or belowground.
It felt like a Mobius strip or a Klein bottle.
They were gradually afflicted by a sense that they were plunging into some alternate world removed from reality.

There was great confusion.
But as soon as new footsteps rang through the large transformer substation, the summoner Uniquely Selfless did not hesitate to shout out.
“Fire at those footsteps!!”
A deluge of gunfire burst from the walls and ceiling. That was not due to echoes. The giant bug Repliglass soldiers really were clinging to those surfaces.
The intense strobe light of their disturbed vision showed something fluttering through the air.
It was a gray plastic sheet about the size of a blanket.
(The bugs’ night vision visors use grayscale, don’t they? So just like the color red vanishes under a red light, their vision is weak to the right form of gray. So that’s why the intruders have slipped past before the Repliglass can react.)
But now they had lost their means of camouflage.
Uniquely Selfless called out again.
“This summon-sealing darkness means they can’t use their summoning ceremony either! Your bullets will reach them now!!”
Countless gunshots and explosions followed.
And that was why Uniquely Selfless was so slow to notice the much smaller bursting sound hidden behind the deluge of noise. *Specifically, the sound of someone throwing an Incense Grenade.*
“Hang on…wait…”
Uniquely Selfless’s voice trembled in the darkness.
He had heard the characteristic sound of bullets being deflected by a protective circle and felt the sensation of something wrapping around himself.
“How can you summon Material here? You created this darkness! You need to see your target with the naked eye rather than mechanical night vision just as much as we do! Otherwise you can’t open an Artificial Sacred Ground!!”
He received no answer.
The true darkness was torn apart by the explosion of scarlet lines and broken music created by the summoning ceremony’s Petals.
One of them could use it and one could not. The difference that created was demonstrated with overwhelming destruction.

As reports came in of the battle lines crumbling one after another and panicked voices reached her ears, Azalea Magentarain sighed with the old butler by her side.
“I see. So that’s his trick.”
She understood it now, but it was too late to pass the information along. The enemy had already broken through. On top of that, the attacker was not

serious about this. He was only using the trick to gain as much ground as he could.
Which meant…
“Milady.”
“Yes. Get everything ready for me.”
A deep sound, much like a giant drumbeat, reverberated more in her gut than her ears.
This was two hundred meters below Toy Dream 35. Pure white bubbles filled the inside of the giant spherical bacteria pool created from silicon as a Repliglass water purifier.
“At this rate, he will definitely make it here. When you get down to it, greater numbers mean nothing in a battle between summoners.”
She grabbed a few reels of ribbons.
“It would seem we need to crush him ourselves.”

Part 3

Shiroyama Kyousuke’s vision was dazzled among the strobe light of so much gunfire. The protective circle defended against all paranormal and physical phenomena now that he had summoned a Material, but anything that did not threaten his life would pass through the protective circle’s filter. There was nothing he could do about this.
“(Dammit. So our trick isn’t going to get us any further. Higan, we’ll have to force our way with a Chain from here on!!)”
It was too dark to see even the hand in front of one’s face with the naked eye.
However, they could not use the summoning ceremony when relying on mechanical night vision equipment either.
So how had Kyousuke and Higan conquered that darkness and summoned a Material?
The answer was quite simple.
“Um… Are these eye drops?”
“They contain homatropine, a parasympathetic nerve blocker. It’s an over-the-counter drug you can buy at a train station drugstore, but I had Lu-san’s help concentrating it a fair bit. It’s a mydriatic…which, simply put, causes your pupil to dilate unnaturally wide.”
“?”
“Basically, it gives you really good night vision, but in exchange makes you more susceptible to camera flashes and the like. Anyway, you don’t have

any eye diseases like glaucoma, do you? This is a concentrated version of a drug you can't give people who have things like that."
They only put the special eye drops in one eye.
As soon as they were swallowed up by the dance of gunfire, he squeezed the one eye shut and switched to using the other one, but that did not entirely eliminate the effect.
Still, he ignored it.
He shook off the sharp headache stabbing into the core of his head and they took out more and more of this normally unbeatable firepower.
They kept the Chain going and kicked through the thick door leading even deeper.
But then…
"…Ugh!?"
His mind was shaken.
For just a brief moment, Shiroyama Kyousuke's "awareness" grew distorted.
First, there was an overwhelming light. The underground structure had been like a construction zone with the power cut off, but this large area was filled with old-fashioned lights such as gas lamps, candles, and chandeliers. Those directly disturbed the eye he had used the eye drops on.
Second, it was an utterly luxurious palace.
It was so very unlike the exposed concrete from before. It was filled with so much gold and art from all around the world that he could hardly believe this was more than fifty meters underground. It felt like that door had led into another world. Kyousuke's brain was shaken as if in a waking dream and he completely forgot where he was and why he was here.
Lastly, there was a giant spherical container.
The ten meter sphere bubbled near the ceiling of that palace and it shined like a star. It was filled with a white bubbling liquid and it just barely retained some traces of its original form as a bacteria pool using Repliglass technology.
"Oh, my."
And that slight pause was a fatal lag when it came to first-rate summoners.
"So it comes down to this in the end, does it? Well, if this world revolves around Her Majesty, I suppose this makes sense."
She would have been absorbed by the Chain-state Artificial Sacred Ground regardless, but she still threw her own Incense Grenade. It was likely a symbol much like throwing a glove at him. The noble blood in her veins had wanted a way to signal the beginning of this duel.
And Azalea did not care about the handicap created by the cost difference in the Material already built up in the Chain.
She had her non-consuming strategy that created an endless loop of her White Thorns with incredible speed and precision.
She could immediately catch up and surpass that difference.
A gorgeous ribbon wrapped around in midair to form a long rod.

With her Blood-Sign in hand, the young lady spoke directly below the unique bacteria pool that resembled a giant crystal ball.
“Now, how about we settle this? You or me? Which servant can move closest to Her Majesty and which one is most worthy of her deep love!?”

Part 4

“Un.”
A clear voice filled the air.
The White Thorns launched from the Blood-Sign collided precisely three times with the walls, floor, decorations, edges of the Artificial Sacred Ground, and the low, middle, high, and lowest sound Petals to draw a variety of different squares and accurately return to her.
“Deux.”
It was not quite a dance.
Nor was it like a circus act.
The many White Thorns were released one after another to draw different squares and different loops in a process that accurately built up her Material at great speed. Azalea viewed it like a Gatling gun.
The structure was simple, so there was no fear of error.
The amount was great, so it could break through any obstacle.
“Trois.”
There was a deafening deluge of noise. The bright red dance of light and chaotic deluge of noise were the song of a mad god that desired war and bloodshed. Azalea’s Material normally would have been easily crushed by the difference in cost level, but it caught the giant claws rushing at it. It stopped them. It endured them. And all the while, it was being built up further. It grew stronger and greater and would soon catch up.
Azalea had the Crimson Calamity of Countless Bestial Heads (nic – a – zx – a – c – ei – tf – b – qux – wzb – a – hatl).
Countless red eyes glowed from a hideous ball-like Material made from dozens of dragon and beast heads, each over a meter tall. Each mouth produced a shockwave-like roar that evenly crushed all foreign objects in its territory.
Shiroyama Kyousuke had the SSC for Puppet #2000 (yi – a – ns – ou – wh – ia – iu – seb – e – hig – o – sd – c – li – dr – oq).
The giant empty armor was controlled by invisible threads attached across its body and two red lights escaped from gaps in the armor like eyes. The twenty meter monster was inorganic, yet it gave off a bestial odor and tore

its prey's internal organs to shreds using sharp claw- and fang-like protrusions. It was simple yet effective, so "as long as it could get close", it could tear open an aircraft carrier's flight deck like a can.
But.
There was little meaning in describing the details of their Materials.
Before it even reached its perfect form, Azalea's Material changed form. It never obtained a stable body, so it almost looked like a melting amorphous stew.
(Normal people might be able to frighten their opponent by taking slow shots and letting them see the result.)
This was Azalea Magentarain, who had once been known as Golden Luxury.
(But my Gatling gun readily destroys the concept of numbers. Cheap, plentiful, and certain. In the face of an "army" that washes away the "individual", the skills and strategies of a single summoner are meaningless.)
She was certain of her victory. The elegant young lady licked her lips as she manipulated her Blood-Sign.
The cost difference had vanished.
The puny savings and tiny handicap were no help when it came to stopping Azalea.
From here on, it was her turn to drive out Shiroyama Kyousuke.
But something odd happened.
With a pleasant sound, a White Thorn flew in the wrong direction.
"Wha-…?"
All of the Thorns should have been moving in square paths to accurately return to her. They would never vanish while her stock naturally replenished itself. That should have allowed her ferocity to grow as time passed.
But a slight fray caused it all to fall apart.
The flying White Thorns were sent off course. The amount returning to her shrank. The speed of her Material's growth dropped and the advantage of the Gatling gun-like quantity collapsed.
(What happened…?)
She was baffled, but her mind worked furiously to analyze the situation. She reached calculation speeds rivalling a ballistic prediction program and concluded that the mistake had not come from her.
But the fact remained that her Gatling gun system had failed.
Which meant…
"What did you do? What did you do to me!?"
Azalea shouted in anger but also attempted to bring back the accurate movements of her Blood-Sign. Sometimes she successfully completed the White Thorn loop and other times it flew off in the wrong direction. Overall, "something" was tripping her up, but she could not figure out what that was. The situation simply continued.

Meanwhile, Shiroyama Kyousuke adjusted his grip on his Blood-Sign and responded calmly.
“It’s true that infinite loop technique will sweep you away if you face it head-on. If I took aim at each individual White Thorn, well, I’d probably never fill the cost gap.”
Yes.
That was how it was supposed to work.
What made no sense was Kyousuke’s unconcerned expression. He should have been sweating bullets with a look of despair as he saw his Material chewed to pieces by the overwhelming cost gap. That was how the equation was set up. Just as one plus one was two, no other result should have been possible!
“But that accurate square loop is a simple structure. You bounce the White Thorn off of the wall, floor, ceiling, decorations, furnishings, Petals, White Thorns, or edges of the Artificial Sacred Ground three times to continually draw that rectangle. *That’s really all it is.*”
It was a simple and basic structure, but that did not mean it was stale.
It was the same idea as a trustworthy weapon having been simplified to the point that it would not malfunction.
But at the same time…
“If the structure is simple, it’s also easy to mess with. You send out a ton of White Thorns and open up the cost gap with overwhelming speed, but as long as I can escape the panic that brings, it isn’t that difficult to think up a way to bring an end to your undefeated legend.”
“And I’m asking what exactly that is!!”
“You still haven’t figured it out? There was likely a hint in the chaos that Guard of Honor caused before we even met.”
Azalea strongly reminded herself that she could not let her thoughts go blank.
She began to suspect that her opponent’s words were no more than a form of psychological warfare meant to keep her from thinking.
But…
“April 14, 10:30 PM. Block R’s harbor region was overrun with the Divine-class Materials you set loose: Fafnir and Yamata-no-Orochi… At several dozen meters tall and twice the height of a gantry crane, their ferocity must have looked like hell on earth. But that brings a certain question to mind.”
“…”
“They were too big. The Artificial Sacred Ground is initially a cube with twenty meter sides, but you’d have a hard time fitting Fafnir or Yamata-no-Orochi in there. At the very least, they wouldn’t be able to fight. *So how were those Divine-classes being used so effectively?*”
“You…can’t mean…”
“*The Artificial Sacred Ground can grow under certain conditions.* It’s probably based on the size of the largest Material inside it. And you use all the obstacles inside to set up your loops. In that case, obstructing you

couldn’t be easier. I just have to change the size of my Material again and again, which changes the size of the Artificial Sacred Ground each time. … Those “moving walls” are all it takes to overturn your accurate calculations.”
That was all it took.
“I’ve managed to gather a bit of information on a celebrity like you. Government Award 930, Golden Luxury. You specialize in high-speed battles in complex areas such as cities or inside buildings. Is that why you’d never really thought about it? Because you generally use the building walls and ceiling rather than the edges of the Artificial Sacred Ground?”
But an excellent weapons developer like Azalea knew first hand not to underestimate simple things and simple structures. She would come up with a countermeasure for his countermeasure. If she did not pour her all into thinking up a way to crush “that”, she would simply be cornered.
She adjusted her grip on her Blood-Sign and used the solid sensation on her fingertips to restructure her mental combat manual. She recovered her fighting spirit from the confusion.
“Tch!! Then I just have to take back the right to determine the Artificial Sacred Ground’s size for myself. If I always summon a bigger and larger Material, I can maintain control!!”
“Perhaps. But surely an expert like you knows how risky it is to continually choose Materials based on their appearance rather than their sound or cost. Head that route too easily and I’ll bite back immediately. I’m already prepared to do just that.”
“…!! Then I only have to complete my loops without using the edges of the Artificial Sacred Ground!!”
“Perhaps. But reducing your freedom will trip up your high-speed tactics. If it isn’t too fast for me to react, there are all sorts of things I can do.”
“——————!!!!!!”
His spoken provocations were proven in actual battle.
They both sent out their White Thorns, but Azalea’s lacked their former brilliance. Kyousuke’s did not provide an overwhelming threat, but she could tell he was gradually nipping at her heels. Her position reminded her of the fallen royalty, whose blood flowed in her veins, when they had been dragged down by the people in a revolution.
That was a mistake.
A moment later, Kyousuke’s speed surpassed hers with a deafening noise.
“Ah…?”
Even if it had declined, her square loop Gatling system was still active. She believed her inferior position was due to his cheap tricks, not a notable difference in pure skill.
She tried to believe it. She wanted to believe it.
However…
“Who said I only had one countermeasure?”

With those words, Kyousuke once more launched a White Thorn. Solid collisions sounded again and again. If Azalea's was a Gatling gun, Kyousuke's was a shotgun. Each time, he produced a wince-inducing deluge of noise like someone slamming their hands down on a piano keyboard.
"Your system accurately draws out a square so the White Thorns always return to your hand, but that means you can't move a bunch of White Thorns at once. Since you need three points for your square, I guess it's three at the most. But the loop is so fast that it ends up looking like you're hitting the Petals into the Spots all at once."
Yes.
This was Shiroyama Kyousuke's second countermeasure against Azalea.
"Then don't I just have to go the opposite route? If I hit five or ten Petals into the Spots with each White Thorn, I can fill the gap."
That was easier said than done.
Once or twice could be written off as a fluke, but it would be incredibly difficult to constantly and reliably knock multiple Petals into the Spots. To be blunt, it involved a lot of luck on top of simple skill. It was only possible if the Petals were conveniently clumped together, so it was not something that could have a steady supply. Including that kind of uncertain element in a weapons system should have led to a malfunction.
(No.)
After thinking that far, a shudder ran down Azalea Magentarain's spine.
(All of the Petals in Toy Dream 35 right now are being influenced by Her Majesty to some extent. But…it can't be… Is he pushing past even that influence and ignoring the main arrangement of Petals to use the seemingly coincidental scattered arrangement…?)
She felt like a great number of eyeballs were staring at her.
Those red spheres were scattered around the Artificial Sacred Ground.
Those many Petals had looked like weapons and opportunities worthy of entrusting her life to, but now they seemed to surround her and look down on her.
Conversely, a king stood in the center of it all. He took the form of a boy and spoke to Azalea.
"This plan was also meant to handle you at your full strength. But now you're a far cry from that, so it seems obvious to me how this will turn out if we continue."
"Don't be ridiculous… It…it isn't possible for me as Uniquely Selfless to lose to something like this! My Gatling gun will tear through any obstacle. Even you have been driven to the precipice of death!!"
"I was judging you."
It was a quiet voice, but it was enough to make Azalea gasp.
"Was your high-speed loop tactic just one of many options or was it all you could do? I waited until the last second, but I'm glad to see that was all you had," said Kyousuke. "For us, the key to all this was whether you would use the trump card we'd already seen and knew about."

Those were not words one spoke to a nightmarish threat.
But Azalea's noble blood refused to say what they were spoken to.
"Who ever said you stood at the top of the world?"
But she could hear him. His voice slipped into her ears.
As Azalea's shoulders trembled and she faced her nemesis head on, Kyousuke simply spoke.
"For us, another summoner like you is nothing more than one point along the way."
Solid sounds followed.
A White Thorn collided with Petals, the Petals were swallowed by the Spots, and his Material changed form again and again.
Above Azalea's head, a fifteen meter pitch black dragon clashed violently with a ten meter giant wielding a magic sword.
The monsters had already surpassed the Regulation-class and reached the Divine-class.
Crimson eyes glowed from both giant Materials as they repeatedly clashed above the Summoners' heads.
But…
(I'm breathing heavily.)
Azalea Magentarain was failing to control herself.
Her mental combat manual was falling apart.
The cause was obvious. Anyone could tell which of them was being pushed back.
(I can't keep my fingertips from shaking. What…what is this feeling…!?)
Someone had told her to be happy.
She had not understood the value of that at the time, but after pursuing that target of her admiration, she had finally realized just how difficult that was to say in this world.
So she had pursued happiness.
She had swept aside the other potential heirs who shared her blood, she had crushed underfoot all the bugs that swarmed in from outside hoping to gain something for themselves, and she had obtained the power of the highest rank in the world of the summoning ceremony.

Even so, one thing had always eluded her.
So…
“I wished for the greatest achievement.”
She spoke under her breath as she recalled the past.
This shaking went by the name of “fear”. She recalled the days so deeply dyed in its colors and she recalled the crude and violent man who had so unreasonably and overwhelmingly saved her from it.
“To reach something that achieves balance when placed on the scales with what I once lost, I can’t fall back now!!!!”
“…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke narrowed his eyes a little at that.
Meanwhile, he accurately moved his Blood-Sign and used the gigantic Divine-class black dragon to definitively corner Azalea and her Material.
That boy likely had no idea what she meant.
Her fragmentary words would not allow him to picture the detailed scene in her mind.
But…
“Yes. I don’t know what happened to you.”
He spoke of a hypothetical.
“But if the order of things had been a little different, you might have been the one I was working to save.”
Those words destroyed the perfectly composed young lady’s expression.
The name Alice (with) Rabbit told her he had the skill to make that kind of idealistic hypothetical a reality.
Azalea Magentarain shouted something as she thrust her Blood-Sign forward with all her might, but Shiroyama Kyousuke did not show a single opening or any mercy.
They were divided between enemy and ally.
One of those sides used a great dragon’s maw to grasp definite victory.

Part 5

The pitch-black dragon’s sharp fangs bit deep into the throat of the giant that held a burning magic sword. It tore the throat out. Ink-like black light burst from the wound at point-blank range. After the horrifyingly primitive violence, the enemy Material vanished. Azalea, who had been held inside the protective circle, and Fractal, her vessel, rolled along the floor after being hit by the shock that had killed a god. They were nearly zombies in the original sense of the word. After controlling the gods and losing, they

were ironically made to dumbly obey any instructions. To prevent any unnecessary injuries as Azalea crawled slowly off, Kyousuke lightly pushed on the back of her head with his Blood-Sign so she would lie down where she was.
He had won.
He had achieved victory.
(No…)
He pulled out his smartphone during the few dozen seconds of their Chain state. The screen indicated they had less than an hour until the limit.
<U-um…is something the matter?>
Higan said something, but Kyousuke did not respond.
(Unless we defeat the White Queen who Guard of Honor worshipped, we can't remove the three thousand or more thorns from Higan's body. And they'll definitely take her life once enough time passes. …What should I do now? It would be very bad if the White Queen showed up, but I can't save Higan without someone summoning her!!)
That was when he heard air bubbles bursting so loudly he felt it in his gut.
He looked up at the Repliglass water purification system. Its core was an artificial bacteria pool made from silicon. The contents of the transparent hundred-meter sphere had grown and were bubbling madly. When Kyousuke saw that, he felt sweat pouring down his body.
The equipment was meant to change seawater into fresh water in order to mass produce fresh water.
Pure water welled up from within, so it symbolized a spring.
Azalea…no, Guard of Honor had rethought the existing summoning ceremony from the ground up and attempted to build a new system to eternally control a Material.
Yes.
That meant the normal process was unnecessary. There was a chance they could overwrite the rules that required summoning one hundred Regulation-class and fifty Divine-class or to accurately hit the Petals in the Spots in just the right order if you wished to summon an Unexplored-class.
"Don't tell me…"
In a way, this was what he had most wanted.
In a way, this was what he had most feared.
"Is that it…? Oh, no!! Higan, get ready. No, maybe it would be best to tear through the bacteria pool before it's complete!!"
<Eh? Eh?>
"She's coming!!"
His warning proved meaningless as it happened before Higan could react.
The spherical container burst from within and stained the entire golden palace with its living soup.
It was like a white downpour.
It was a similar phenomenon to the red tide where an excess of plankton gave the seawater a rusty color. In this case, the world was dyed white

rather than red. It covered up the colors of Golden Luxury in the blink of an eye. All of the decorations and artworks were thoroughly stained to display their master's color: white.
That was the color of the Queen who ruled this bloodthirsty world that reeked of rust.
"It's been too long, brother."
"She" floated calmly in the spot the giant crystal ball of a container had been.
There was no real reason for it, but since she preferred to stand in the same place as him, she floated down to the palace floor so slowly that gravity did not seem to apply.
He had seen his new enemy.
The Chain state changed to something else and the enemy was taken into the Artificial Sacred Ground.
"Hmm. I have a feeling you met *a different me* a little ahead of time, but every day away from you feels like a thousand years…no, a trillion years. … So I'm glad everything advanced as planned. If you made me wait any longer, I might just have been angry enough to split apart an earth or two☆"
She had loose pure white clothing and a silver coloration.
Her waist-length twintails were closer to white than silver.
"……"
Shiroyama Kyousuke was forced into silence.
He had toyed with the summoners of Guard of Honor who were powerful enough for a direct war with the aces of Government, Illegal, and Freedom and he had coolly defeated Azalea Magentarain who had ruled over them, but one look at the Queen's face was enough to silence him.
It was best to view her as just that great an opponent.
She was not controlled by a summoner or bound by a vessel. She was not restricted to the Artificial Sacred Ground or to the ten minute time limit.
The White Queen had been released upon the world.
Just like the mistake a young Kyousuke had once made in his ignorance.
"There is no need to tremble like that. Heh heh. But I kind of like it when you act like a cute little animal, brother."
The White Queen laughed gently yet insanely as she spoke.
"Everything Guard of Honor had to offer just wasn't nearly enough to reach your intellect, brother. They failed to control me with their Sewn Realm summoning and there are countless weaknesses all throughout their methodology, but that has not affected my specs all that much. I seem to be restricted to about the same level of power as with the Blood-Sign method you usually use."
"…"
"But not to worry. The 'things that crawl from the sea' won't appear unless I'm exposed for 180 seconds in a row. Right now I'm bound to your Artificial Sacred Ground, so you just have to throw a new Incense Grenade once the

time limit arrives. Of course, that will mean building up your own Material from scratch.”
Their work had come to nothing. Their efforts had been wasted. The White Queen had indeed appeared in this world, but she was still contained to a smaller frame no different from the Blood-Sign method.
But she felt no frustration or anger over that.
That had been Guard of Honor’s desire, not the White Queen’s. Plus, she was already the strongest. It did not matter if some details had changed a little, if she was not at 100% purity, or if she was only the mere remnants of what she could be. Her position at the top would not be shaken.
“Now, brother.”
She spoke calmly, like a songstress speaking to the audience from a large stage.
“I have failed just as you wanted. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for you. Not taking advantage of this perfect setup would be a disgrace to your masculinity. Now, now. You can start whenever you like. Or if you want, you can stay on the run to delay things until I run out of time.”
(Like I can do that…)
He spat out the words in his heart without speaking them aloud.
The White Queen was not relying on an Incense Grenade this time, so she likely had no ten minute time limit. It might be a minute and it might be an hour. He knew Guard of Honor’s Fairy of the Spring style of Sewn Realm summoning had failed, but he had not analyzed how exactly it had failed. Going for a lengthy battle now would be like running full speed in an endurance race without actually knowing where the goal was. He would be unable to pace himself.
(No, it’s also wrong to think I could fight a defensive battle against someone with firepower as extraordinarily high as the White Queen. Whether it’s just a minute or just thirty seconds, we’d be worn down and killed. I’ll have to look for a way to attack, no matter how dangerous it might be. As she said, this is my best chance at this since Guard of Honor’s method failed.)
It may have been like taking a dose of poison one hundred times the lethal limit after diluting it one hundred times.
It may have been like getting hit by a three hundred kilometer per second bullet train after slowing it down three hundred times.
Either way, it was a threat. Either way, it was fatal.
But…
<Let’s do this.>
His vessel’s voice slipped into his mind.
<We can’t just ignore this. We may have been wrong to force our ideal onto her and she might actually be something else entirely, but if this goddess mocks human efforts and simply watches as her encouraging push actually pushes them off a cliff, then she’s nothing but evil. …Let’s defeat the White Queen here. We have to!!>

Her words could be seen as naïve, but it gave the push his frozen heart needed.
The summoner slowly inhaled and gave a shout.
“Higan, let’s go for it all at once! She isn’t at her best now, so we can defeat a foe we could never normally-…!!”
He was unable to finish.
A brilliant band of white light instantly slammed Higan into the wall in her gigantic black dragon form.
“Wha-…?”
The strike had pierced straight through her torso. Knowing where the Silhouette that held Higan’s mind was stored, the sight was enough to feel his throat dry up.
But Kyousuke could not even watch the Material’s giant body slide down to the ground.
There was a flash of light.
The pure white laser beam of an attack burned a seemingly permanent afterimage into the air. No…
(Did she tear away the world itself to make it pure white!?)
The standard theories no longer applied. Even the Petals and Spots that no one could normally touch were swallowed up and vanished. Everything from this world and the other world was torn away and deleted.
After a lag of a few seconds, the pure white remnant receded. The world returned with some static.
That compressed power was meant to kill a summoner and the Material.
No master plan was needed to destroy the world. If she lost control of her power and it scattered outward, that single attack might have caused the planet to crumble like a biscuit.
“Ahh, brother. …How could you speak another girl’s name during our date? What the hell are you thinking?”
The White Queen was not bothered that she had only temporarily deleted space-time.
The naturally regenerating rifts in the world must not have been worthy of surprise.
She did not bother running around or approaching. A portion of the white clothing loosely wrapped around her transformed in silence. It took the form of a hammer, flew through the air on its own, and dropped toward Kyousuke like a shooting star.
The summoner was contained within a protective circle that defended against any physical phenomenon and Material attack.
The impact that rattled his brain easily overturned that assumption.
It was not an issue of any actual injury. He could clearly sense “the presence of death” approaching.
He gasped, his mind grew muddy, and his vision twisted as he worked desperately to grasp the situation.
“Bh…gah!? Im…possible…”

Fresh blood dripped to the floor from his forehead.
The next one came before the confusion faded. The protective circle might as well have been a plastic balloon as the corner of a shield thrust up into his jaw and a club knocked him back down before his toes could leave the ground. His mind was shaken as he rolled away from the scorching light of the scene.
The damage of the white rampage was clearly arriving within the protective circle. That circle protected the summoner…or rather, the ceremony itself from any external attacks, internal illness, or anything else that might get in the way. But that assumption was rejected by the approaching chill of death.
“Ah hah hah!! Even in this state, I am still the extraordinary Queen that stands at the top of the Unexplored-class☆ The circle that protects the summoner…or rather, the ceremony is generally made from the excess energy of the Material. That small fry can’t hold a candle to me even if it goes all out, so did you really think the life support environment created from its dregs would be enough to block my lethality?”
She was insane.
Her actions completely ignored the laws of the world.
No other Material could replicate this.
Did the Queen’s clothing physically exist or was she just manipulating light to make it look that way? Before even judging her power, he had more fundamental doubts. And on that note, what was she herself? Could something like that really exist?
(Was I…wrong?)
More than the pain, it was the absurdity of what was happening that nearly robbed Shiroyama Kyousuke of his consciousness. He nearly forgot what he needed to do and lost sight of his very first assumption.
He wavered. He wobbled.
The extreme confusion turned that ever-composed boy into a mere human.
(No matter what happened, should I not have faced this monster using the rules of a summoner? Should I not have placed Meinokawa Higan in front of her?)
A gigantic being collapsed atop several crushed pieces of artwork by the wall, but now it began to move.
It was the pitch-black dragon. The will inside it was sent to Kyousuke via their contract.
<Don’t worry… I can keep going. If we don’t defeat the White Queen, th-this city is in trouble. No, it might not stop at Toy Dream 35. So we can do this. We can definitely do this.>
Her rebuke may have been misguided.
<At the moment, we might not have as much power as you had thought. In fact, there might not be any summoner in the world with the power to stand up to the White Queen. But still…>

She may have had the wrong objective in mind as they had intentionally kept information from her.
<When someone says “help me” and asks you to save them, it’s never wrong to want to reach out your hand to them even if you know it won’t end well for you! And you aren’t alone now. When a summoner has a vessel, then they have a hand to reach out to someone!!>
But…
<Right now, the two of us are Alice (with) Rabbit! So I’ll support you!!>
Those words saved him, even if just a little.
That nickname had actually been given to him by the nemesis before his eyes.
If he looked back on this later, it might seem like a traumatic mistake.
But at the time, Shiroyama Kyousuke was definitely saved by those words.
That nickname had been forced on him from above as he sank into humiliation and defeat.
But now he felt like it had been given new meaning.
Meinokawa Higan knew nothing.
She had not noticed the true meaning behind the original job at the harbor, she had mistaken Government for Guard of Honor at the school, she did not know the White Queen held her life in her hands, and she did not know Renge, Kyousuke, and the others had risked their lives to free her from that.
She knew nothing from beginning to end.
But despite that, she was the one who had reached the most correct answer.
“Higan.”
He spoke her name again.
Just one of the White Queen’s eyelids twitched, but Kyousuke continued regardless.
“We’re about to defeat the White Queen, the peak of the Unexplored-class. Let’s end this farce as soon as possible and fix everything that was twisted! *So lend me your strength, Meinokawa Higan!!*”

Part 6

In truth, what was there that they could still do?
“Ah☆”
The Queen had destroyed the small kingdom made just for her. She spun around and around at the center so that her loose white clothing and long twintails fluttered around her.

The cloth on her back instantly changed form and burst out like giant wings or a bed of spikes.
A total of 256 spikes wholly tore apart the opposite walls.
One of the black dragon's wings was torn off and the rest was cruelly pinned down.
One of them flew toward Kyousuke. It easily penetrated the protective circle, so the boy himself used all his strength to swing his upper body out of the way.
A single line of blood appeared on his right cheek.
Kyousuke did not overestimate his ability by thinking he had dodged it. If a Divine-class Material had been unable to dodge or defend against the attack, a mere human never could have.
The White Queen was clearly toying with him.
"Oh, dear. What seems to be the matter, brother?"
The white light that seemed to have been burned into the air by the attack was proof that it had damaged the world itself.
"If you were going the futile resistance route, you could have jumped a little further than that. Why, it almost looks like you were using the protective circle to protect your enemy lying on the floor there."
Kyousuke clicked his tongue.
Azalea and her elderly butler were still crawling around behind him. If he had not slightly diverted the white spike's trajectory by intentionally letting it pierce the protective circle, one of them would have died.
"Did they speak the cursed words of 'help me'?"
"This isn't about that. I decide what happens to the enemies I defeat. These days, Alice (with) Rabbit doesn't just apply to allies. Times have changed, Queen."
"But it's too bad."
The twintailed Queen giggled as if to reward him for a perfect answer.
"That means you can no longer move from that spot, brother."
<Kh, what is this…?>
Higan's thoughts cut in.
<It won't make any attacks… Is it…afraid? There's no attack command to base it on, so no matter what I do, my commands won't lead to an actual attack!?> Vessels did not have complete control of their Material.
When and how to attack was left up to the Material's own desires and the vessel only forced it all to work out by determining "who" to attack.
That meant the vessel could not continue fighting if the Material itself lost the will to attack. The pitch-black dragon's crimson eyes were filled with the frightened light of a helpless prey.
This too ignored the usual way of things. A Material was normally a cruel creature that destroyed anything and everything it set eyes on.
"Didn't I tell you, brother?"
The metal wings vanished and elegant fabric covered the White Queen's back once more.

This time, she gave a quick wave of a hand.
Most of the clothing on her right half formed a giant fist and slammed into the black dragon from the side.
“I stand at the peak of all Materials. Opposing me is simply out of the question. Everything in *the other* world serves me. If you would just become mine, I would be willing to give you half of them, though☆”
It sounded like a full-speed bullet train crashing into a truck stopped on the tracks. The Queen’s clothing transformed further. Metal balls, metal rods, hatchets, and other pure white weapons rushed out to torment the giant black dragon from countless angles. All the while, the world itself was carved away into whiteness.
“Kh!!”
Kyousuke used his Blood-Sign to launch a White Thorn. It hit various Petals into the Spots and the Material changed form. A dance of crimson light and a broken song swept over that small world.
He had already reached the Divine-class. That meant these were the gods of mythology. He searched for something with even the slightest will to oppose the White Queen.
“Didn’t…”
——A pure white spear pierced through a great man with golden eyes who summoned lightning with a vajra.
“…I tell you…”
——Three red-eyed sisters known as goddesses of revenge were crushed one after another by a massive maw.
“…it’s useless☆?”
——A violent dance of white arrows rained down on a golden-eyed god of death known as the smoky mirror.
The incredible destruction was entirely one-sided, the very structure of the world crumbled, a portion of the scene filled with the color white, and the palace that Guard of Honor had decorated with treasures old and new from around the world finally collapsed. Decorations and works of art that had untold historical value were cruelly crushed. This was the greatest way for that master of violence to enjoy them. The White Queen looked like a lovely girl, but a portion of her true nature could be seen here.
Higan’s screams echoed directly in Kyousuke’s head.
He just barely managed switched her to a new Material right before she was annihilated, but they all refused to fight the Queen. They stepped down from the stage before doing so.
“The Divine and Unexplored-classes are entirely different categories. This is like racing a normal luxury car against a custom drag racer that can reach half the speed of sound using the rocket engine forcefully strapped to it. Ah☆ I made an effort to learn about this world so I could speak with you, brother. I think that’s worth at least one head pat.”
“…”

If the White Queen's mischievous-sounding comment was correct, he at least needed to push their Material up to the Unexplored-class.
"So I'll give you a chance, brother."
The White Queen clapped her hands in front of her chest and gave him a beaming smile.
"Hurry up and raise your Material up to the Unexplored-class. With your skill, that shouldn't be difficult, should it? …If I don't get in your way, that is☆"
The White Queen walked slowly closer like she was strolling around an art museum and enjoying the exhibits. But hers was truly the royal road. No one could stop her advance.
Kyousuke clenched his teeth, but he had no choice but to go along with her suggestion. In fact, the summoning ceremony battles were all about changing from one Material to the next, so the White Queen was the odd one for never changing and ignoring the sound range and cost.
"Goddammit!!"
Solid sounds rang out again and again as Kyousuke built up the Material containing Higan. The mad dance of red light and the broken song were so quick and accurate that they could only be perceived after the fact. She became a giant bird that produced all the world's winds and she became a hero who had fished up an island in the southern sea. Each one was a power great enough to influence the outcome of a war, but Kyousuke continued using his Blood-Sign as even those gods were only midway points.
That soon crossed a certain line.
With a brilliant light, the design of the Material greatly changed.
It became a short-haired girl in a wheelchair who wore purple cloth that only covered the bare minimum. But perhaps due to how very skinny she was, she looked more sickly than alluring. Her head lolled weakly and her limbs dangled limply, but her right hand alone rose up to express her will.
She was one of the Unexplored-class.
She was the Lady of "Purple Lightning" that Separates Good from Evil (iu – ao – eu – ei – kub – miq – a – ci – pl).
<Yeah, this should work.>
Higan honestly thought that. Even with her green-glowing eyes lowered and covered by her bangs, the Lady of Purple Lightning extended her one slender hand that wriggled like a living creature as she pointed the index finger at the White Queen. A purple light glowed at the tip of that finger.
She was not afraid. She knew her opponent was the White Queen, but she still demonstrated the will to fight.
<I can fight like this. I can stand on the same field. At the very least, um, it hasn't given up before the fight even begins!!>
Higan remembered this Unexplored-class slicing apart a giant metal bridge and artificial waterway at the end of that battle at the harbor, so fear of it had permeated her bones.

And Kyousuke had once said that it did not matter if you were a rookie or an expert, everyone had the same chance at any strategy and any Material.
So for the first time, she decided to fight back.
A moment later, a deafening sound of destruction burst from the Lady of Purple Lightning's body.
<Wha-…?>
Meinokawa Higan was appropriately dumbfounded.
It had happened just after the White Queen's skirt had fluttered.
As soon as she thought the entire large piece of cloth had transformed, there had been countless thick chains with anchor-like three-pronged hooks at the ends. The Queen had spun around, creating a steel tornado for several dozen meters around her. The world itself was wiped away and that massive white light also pursued her target.
A hook lodged itself in the Lady of Purple Lightning's left shoulder and tore all the way into her chest. For better or for worse, the rapidly rotating hook launched the Lady of Purple Lightning's body so she rolled along the floor rather than having her heart torn out. The heart had to be where the Silhouette storing Higan's mind was.
<Ah, gahuh!? Agbah!! Cough…!!???>
One attack.
All of this was just one attack.
"If you build your Material up past the Divine-class and to the Unexplored-class, it is true you can oppose me to an extent."
The White Queen laughed as she returned her skirt to normal.
She was completely unchanged.
"But so what if you can oppose me? Even if you have the #2 or #3 of the Unexplored-class or even one of the Three that support Government, Illegal, and Freedom, they are no match for me at the top. #1 is known as #1 because there is no one else there. Do you understand now?"
"Goddammit…"
"Of course, that's assuming a one-on-one structure."
The White Queen smiled as she placed her index finger on her jaw and slightly lifted her gaze as if recalling something.
"I am in an imperfect state at the moment, so you might have a chance if you make a saturation attack using several dozen Unexplored-classes. Yes, just like when your theory succeeded but your equipment lacked the strength to hold onto my reins and you could not send me back to the other world. If only you had about 10% of the fighting force sent to that largely unknown war where so many summoners and vessels died to clean your mess."

“Goddammiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit!!”
Kyousuke finally cast everything aside and shouted at the top of his lungs. This was not the veteran summoner or Alice (with) Rabbit. It was the remaining child within him that could not stand how hopelessly unreasonable this was.
He had thought he would have a chance when she had her guard down. He had thought he could stab her in the side if he could slip away from her playful attempt to suppress his actions.
But this was all he had managed.
She had given him that chance just to provide all the more despair by taking it away. It had all progressed according to her plan and he had not moved even a millimeter outside of it. And the resulting suffering had been placed on Meinokawa Higan. Kyousuke was the underlying reason why her life was at risk.
“Now, brother.”
The White Queen smiled.
The strong did not change and were not shaken. She was the most extreme example of that.
“Now, now, brother! What shall we do now? Is it time to entertain me by begging for your life? Using a hostage to make you my servant might be nice. …Oh, but I know what to do. I love you more than anyone else in the world, so wouldn’t it be a lovely symbol of our love to enjoy your tearful face as I wreak havoc around you? Eh heh. Eh heh heh heh heh heh.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke gasped for breath while desperately working his mind.
——Was there really nothing he could do?
There was not. The Regulation and Divine-classes could not even fight. And while the Unexplored-class could choose to oppose the White Queen, the difference in strength was simply overwhelming. Not even the #2, the #3, or the Three that protected the three major powers could defeat the White Queen who reigned at the top.
He could not make a saturation attack with several dozen Unexplored-class. A summoner could switch between Materials, but they could not summon multiple at the same time.
——Could he just give up?
He could not. But what realistic action could he take? No matter which of the three sound ranges his Material belonged to, he could never defeat the White Queen. She existed outside the rules of the summoning ceremony, so he could not defeat her as a summoner fighting according to those rules.
——Then what had he resolved himself to do before coming here?
……
After thinking that far, Shiroyama Kyousuke smiled a little.
He realized he had yet to use everything available to him. No, he realized something in his heart was still holding him back.
He needed to remember what he had told Meinokawa Higan when she had been cornered at the school.

Don’t reject the fear.
Accept the fear and smile at the fact that a method like that even exists.
“Oh, what a lovely expression… Of course, any expression of yours is perfect. By the way, what are you thinking to put such a photo-worthy look on your face?”
“Oh, I just remembered a bit of a promise is all.”
Kyousuke used both hands to lightly spin his Blood-Sign around.
“The thing is, Queen, I made a promise. It isn’t about money and I didn’t sign a strange contract on parchment, but it was still a promise.”
The White Queen continued smiling as she tilted her head a little.
Alice (with) Rabbit stood there, but that name meant something different from when she had given it to him.
“I promised to save a strange set of twins named Meinokawa Renge and Meinokawa Higan. I promised to do whatever it took to accomplish that. Yes – ha ha – what could be more basic? I can’t believe I didn’t realize this until the very end. I was fighting yet I’d forgotten the promise I made, so I must have gotten careless. So it’s time I remembered Alice (with) Rabbit.”
“You dare speak not one but *two* girl’s names in front of me, brother? That is worthy of quite a few deaths. Yes, perhaps I should kill you about ten times for it…”
“Weren’t you listening?” said Shiroyama Kyousuke as he raised his Blood-Sign in both hands. “I said I would do whatever it takes, didn’t I? I announced I would use whatever dirty trick necessary to save the Meinokawa Sisters. That means I’ll even place my allies in danger to utterly defeat you.”
“Oh, dear. Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear.”
An ominous shadow fell over the White Queen’s smile.
This was not a woman catching her beloved boyfriend in the act of cheating. This was not that sort of appropriate anger. This was the look of someone who had yet again caught their beloved dog tearing up the sofa and cushions while they were out and were now pondering whether they should beat it to death with a bat and stuff it in a garbage bag.
“Are you so angry that some boyish power blossomed inside you? Or are you the type whose latent talent (ha ha) comes to the surface when your life is in danger? I don’t care if your hair turns gold or you become a savior in full-body tights, but what can you actually do?”
“You’ll see.”
“Then you might not make it in time.”
The cloth on the White Queen’s arms turned to particles of light. They became primitive and giant scissors that resembled a stag beetle and would crush its target from either side.
This was a method of providing the greatest suffering without killing the target too easily.
“After all, brother, I’ve lost just a bit of my patience.”

As soon as Shiroyama Kyousuke made a pointless strike with his Blood-Sign, great cruelty rushed back at him.
It was said a mother cat would sometimes get so worked up protecting her kitten from an external threat that she herself would kill that very kitten.

Part 7

The boy's fate was sealed.
Low, middle, and high sounds. Regulation, Divine, and Unexplored-class. The White Queen could easily ignore all of those categories and she was, in all seriousness, coming to kill Shiroyama Kyousuke. The protective circle meant to defend the ceremony more than the summoner had already been proven entirely useless against her fierce attacks and they could not be dodged with human reflexes and kinetic vision.
That meant the boy's fate should have been sealed.
Even with the supernatural power of the summoning ceremony and a Material, he could not stop the White Queen. She would twist the world's destiny and the natural laws to fulfill her personal objective and at the moment that objective was to kill Shiroyama Kyousuke. That was nothing more than data entered so it could be fulfilled.
And yet.
And yet.
And yet!!!!!
A moment later, "something" deflected the giant stag beetle scissors.
"……What?"
For a brief moment and likely for the very first time, the White Queen's smile froze on her face. Her ever-confident thoughts had momentarily come to a stop.
No Material could stop her.
That meant there was no one in this world or *the other* world that could reach her level.
Nevertheless, Shiroyama Kyousuke was still alive.
The Lady of Purple Lightning had grown dark and discolored as her arms forcibly pushed at the giant stag beetle scissors from within!!
"What is this…?"
"Didn't I tell you I'd use any dirty trick!? Using the standard rules of summoning, isn't there one really, really bad plan that can actually defeat you!?"

Taboo 1: A summoner must not knock in an equal number of low, middle, and high noises.
Taboo 3: When a summoner runs out of White Thorns, none of their White Thorns remaining on the field must be knocked into a Spot.
Something like amorphous black mud rose up like a tornado. The top spread out like a trumpet mouth and would be packed full of sharp and disturbingly uneven fangs that could be seen as organic or inorganic.
It was a symbol of execution.
It was every summoner's greatest fear.
"And in battles between Materials, the strict numbers matter most. Even if the difference only amounts to a scratch or the slightest bit of exhaustion, *if the exact same Material is summoned on both sides, the one summoned first will be at a disadvantage!!* Normally a summoner would use their Blood-Sign to swap it out for a different Material, but you can't even do that right now, Queen!!"
"Impossible… Brother, do you really understand what this means? That Black Maw is punishment from the gods. It attacks the one who summoned it, not their enemy. That means you will be the first one it attacks!!"
"Perhaps," bluntly admitted Shiroyama Kyousuke. "But won't you save me? After all, you love me. Even if it's still you, can you really just sit idly by and watch a different version of yourself kill me and steal everything from you?"
He ignored her and continued.
"You wanted to fight alongside me and you wanted me to rely on, right? In that case, aren't you yourself your greatest rival since you're the only one that can put up a fight against you?"
The White Queen's face had nearly melted and Kyousuke shuddered as he realized what that meant.
" 'I haven't the slightest interest in anything except you, brother.' Who said that?"
Some thin thread within the White Queen's head seemed to snap from immense joy.
"Heh…heh hah…heh hah….ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

As if she had been provoked, this alternate form of the same individual destroyed her own expression.
“Brother! Oh, brother!! Hee hee hee heh heh heh heh ha ha!! F-finally, the day has come when I get to chew apart my beloved brother’s body from head to toe. Heh heh heh. Ah ha ha. Ee hee ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!!!”
Two voices rang with laughter.
Two gazes intertwined.
Two faces lost all expression.
Two thoughts made a single decision.
“She’s in the way. I can’t have brother to myself with her here.”
“She’s in the way. I can’t have brother to myself with her here.”
Immediately, the end of the world played out before Shiroyama Kyousuke’s eyes.
He had never seen more destruction.
The boy had said he would use any dirty trick if it meant saving that girl.

Part 8

Cut, bite, crush, pierce, shoot, squeeze, scrape, repel, soak, burn, sever, uproot, freeze, beat, squash, strangle, split, break, throw, twist, gouge, rip, absorb, and smash.
It only lasted a few seconds, but after the light and darkness caused enough destruction and catastrophe for the world itself to crumble around them, only one of the white and black remained.
“Heh…heh hah.”
It had come down to a hint of exhaustion or a slight scratch.
That had determined this battle between Materials with identical specs.
Just as Kyousuke had expected.
“Ah hah…ah hah hah… Brother. Oh, brother…”
It had been cannibalistic. It had been the slaughter of one’s own. It was amazing that the black-dyed Queen could even stand. In fact, she did not even have all four limbs anymore.
She may have been standing and she may have been floating, but she slowly approached all the same.
“Now, that nuisance is gone… No one in the world can stop me. Ah ha, ah ha ha. It’s time to chew you apart…from head to toe…”
“That’s one idea.”
Kyousuke smiled a little as he spoke.

The Black Maw was a symbol of the taboo. Once she devoured the offending summoner, she would vanish on her own. To save Meinokawa Higan, he needed to have the Black Maw leave as soon as possible. Her actions were restricted by a clear objective and set rules, so there was a lot more hope than with the White Queen who had gone on an indiscriminate rampage with the power of the “spring”.
A sticky sound spread as what had once been the beautiful Queen approached.
If she devoured him, it would all be over.
In exchange for Shiroyama Kyousuke’s life, Meinokawa Higan’s life would be saved.
“Yes.”
But a certain thought came to his mind.
He considered what that meant He wanted to live and see what happened afterwards, but what was it he wanted to see?
“Your idea…”
“?”
“Wouldn’t count as saving them…”
He had told Meinokawa Renge that sacrificing someone would not truly save her sister Higan.
Meinokawa Higan had said they were both Alice (with) Rabbit and that she could support him.
So in that moment…
“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”
Shiroyama Kyousuke fought back. He raised his Repliglass Blood-Sign and used his one and only chance by forcefully launching a White Thorn.
The black Queen did not even bother looking that way.
She bit at the feast before her eyes. The protective circle was meaningless.
Kyousuke kept his eyes on the White Thorn while ignoring the intense pain and disturbing chewing noise coming from his shoulder.
It was a simple method listed even in Government’s strict textbooks.
The White Thorn flew straight out and hit a low sound Petal. That Petal was absorbed by a nearby Spot and a single pure sound rang out.
Yes.
This abnormal Material had been created from the even number of low, middle, and high sounds, so this shot broke that balance.
“Ah.”
“Th-this might be a first. Normally, the Black Maw kills the summoner as soon as it appears, so they don’t have time to try this.”
“Ahhh, ah.”
“Farewell, Black Maw. …I don’t need to cheat, so I’ll defeat you within the rules. You’re still a Material. And even if I lost control as a penalty for the Taboo, you’re still a Material under my command!!”
The balance had been broken.
She shifted to another Material.

“Brother. Oh, I can still taste you, brotherrrr

- Regulation and Divine-classes lose their will to fight in front of the White Queen. Even other Unexplored-classes have little hope of putting up a fight.
- The White Queen’s attacks can destroy the basic components that make up both worlds. If her concentrated and controlled power were to disperse outwards, it could destroy the entire planet.
- The Unexplored-class Lady of Purple Lightning looks like a normal person and her Silhouette is in her heart.
- When the White Queen once appeared in this world with a Sewn Realm summoning, a great number of summoners summoned hundreds of Unexplored-classes and somehow managed to settle matters with a saturation attack. This is known as the Secret War.
- The Black Maw that appears to punish those who violate the taboos is actually a girl who looks just like the White Queen.
- As she was summoned by a new system, the White Queen should not have had the weakness of a Silhouette, but since the Black Maw had identical specs, it is thought she had a temporary weakness to take its place.
- Hit a Petal into a Spot after the Black Maw appears and it will turn into a different Material. …But that’s only if you have a chance to.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke became the first to earn the Award named White Slayer on one’s own.
- Despite being at a disadvantage, Shiroyama Kyousuke took control of every battle facing him and kept his promises to the Meinokawa Sisters.

Ending X-01: A Certain Parting and an Ending

「……もしも、それでも冥乃河姉妹が
お兄ちゃんを見つけ出せたとしたら……」
「それはもう、立派な奇跡とは呼べないのですか、お兄ちゃん?」

(Ending X-01 Open 04/16 14:50)

エンディングX-01

ある別離と終わり

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“If the Meinokawa Sisters still manage to find you…”
“Wouldn’t that qualify as a miracle, Onii-chan?”

A Certain Parting and an Ending
(Ending X-01 Open 04/16 14:50)

After escaping with their lives, Meinokawa Renge and Higan were given a large sum of money to keep quiet about what happened.
It could have come from Government, Illegal, Freedom, Quad Motors, or the Toy Dream Company. That unknown origin may have been a test to see if they would simply stay quiet and not search out where it came from.
“It seems the Meinokawa Sisters obediently accepted the money.”
“That’s good to hear. You must know where it came from since you gave it to them, Aika. In that case, I can assume it’s safe. I don’t want any strange trouble cropping up after all that.”
Swimsuit Girl Aika was speaking on the phone. She held the cordless phone to her ear while sitting on the white liger that was lying in her luxury apartment’s living room.
Her eyes wandered aimlessly through the air as she sank deeper into her pet’s fur.
“It wasn’t a bunch of cash inside an attache case. It was just a memo with the ID and password for an online bank, so it didn’t seem to quite seem real to them.”
“It doesn’t matter. They can tie up all their loose ends if they pay off their debt and get back their shrine. Their parents’ gambling addiction didn’t seem that deep-rooted, so they can redo things if they get back to the normal world.”
“So did you sever the summoner/vessel contract before Meinokawa Higan woke up?”
“That’s right.”
“Again?”
“I’ll keep doing it as many times as I have to.”
Their conversation hinted that they had repeated this exchange many times before.
“I’ve earned too many Awards. I’m Freedom 902…no, I guess I’m 903 now. I’ve invited in too many unpleasant things along the way, so it seems cruel to keep Meinokawa Higan in the Alice (with) Rabbit framework any longer. This industry isn’t kind enough for me to keep someone around after they’ve achieved their goal and lost their reason to fight.”
“That is true, but…”
Aika sighed.
The problem was Shiroyama Kyousuke’s powerful connection with the White Queen. To live with and walk alongside him was to face that level of danger 24/7/365.
That was not something one could survive on simple skill alone. Not even having luck on their side was enough to ensure their survival in that environment.

“The Meinokawa Sisters were angry.”
“Yeah, probably. …Hm? You mean Renge was too?”
“I’m not sure why I would want to help my rivals, but you should think more about what you gain by helping people.”
The white liger’s ears twitched.
It had heard a sea bird crying through the phone. That may have stimulated the hunger of the carnivorous couch.
“Where are you right now, Onii-chan?”
“Stop that. Do you really think I’d tell you?”
“Don’t tell me you’re leaving Toy Dream 35 in your cruiser. Then who will wash my swimsuits!?”
“Again, you’re going to have to look after yourself once I retire, so start learning. …I am moving the cruiser, but I’m staying in the city for a while. I won’t tell you for how long, though. I’ll just show up when we need to meet. Is that okay?”
“Either way, I’m a shut in, so I’m not about to leave. As long as you’ll look after me, I don’t care what you do.”
Aika spun the cordless phone around just once.
“I think the Meinokawa Sisters are going to go looking for you. Even if that means running all over the city.”
“Perhaps. But I’m used to that.”
“By the way, Onii-chan. Do you believe in miracles?”
“I think they do happen, but they’re not ours to mess with. That’s why we wanted a way to freely control the Materials who do cause them.”
“No, not that. I mean miracles made by human hands.”
“?”
“You did everything perfectly, Onii-chan. You even cleaned up afterwards perfectly, so no one had any chance to intervene as all the loose ends were tied up.”
Aika sounded somehow excited as if she were rolling a candy around in her mouth.
“But if the Meinokawa Sisters still manage to find you…wouldn’t that qualify as a manmade miracle, Onii-chan?”

And somewhere in the city, Shiroyama Kyousuke turned around with his smartphone in hand.
He looked up ahead into the flood of lights beyond the bustling crowd.
And there he saw…

Facts

- The Meinokawa Sisters escaped their life of debt thanks to a large sum of hush money.
- The contract between summoner and vessel can be canceled by the summoner if they can see the vessel with the naked eye.
- The contract was canceled and Meinokawa Higan ceased to be part of Alice (with) Rabbit.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke has parted ways with people again and again to ensure they would not drag around Alice (with) Rabbit’s baggage.

Ending X-02: A Certain Meeting and an Ending

「ですが」

「きっとあにうえは、最後には

こんなわたくしさえ『助けて』しまうのでございましょうね」

(Ending X-02 Open 04/16 15:00)

エンディングX-02

ある遭遇と終わり

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“But.”
“I’m sure you will end up ‘saving’ even me in the end.”

A Certain Meeting and an Ending
(Ending X-02 Open 04/16 15:00)

There was no one there.
It was to be expected.
Shiroyama Kyousuke smiled a little as he looked back across the large land bridge. He stuck his smartphone in his pocket, but the action was somewhat awkward since he had one arm in a cast.
(What was I expecting?)
This was exactly the result he had been working for.
Even so, he felt a twinge of pain as he continued forward.
If there were indeed manmade miracles, he might meet the Meinokawa Sisters again as Aika had suggested. He did not know if that would be a good thing, but they would likely be drawn together.
Did he want that or not?
For some reason, he could not reach an answer.
“Now, then.”
At any rate, the job was complete. He had not always been able to predict the Meinokawa Sisters’ actions, but he doubted they could find him so easily.
So this was the end. Or it should have been.
“Oh. My. Dear. Brother☆”
Unpleasant sweat poured down his body as soon as a sweet voice reached his ears.
This had happened once before. A summoner had likely approached using a Chain rather than an Incense Grenade. He found himself inside an Artificial Sacred Ground and “she” was right next to him.
It was the White Queen.
It was the highest of the Unexplored-class.
It was a collection of benevolence, a symbol of holiness, and an anthropomorphism of radiance.
It was a pure white goddess who would not allow even a drop of impurity.
Or so the summoners and vessels across the world believed.
In this giant amusement park city, her otherworldly apparel would be seen as just another costume. Her beauty would gather attention, but she did not seem to care.
Kyousuke hesitantly spoke to the Queen who was so lethally close by.
“Shouldn’t you be dead?”
“Well, yes. But that me was an irregular version summoned with something other than the normal summoning ceremony. Plus, it was an unfinished product that did not quite manage to *sew* me into one of this world’s human souls.”
“You mean…your very being was split in two?”

“Although if the Sewn Realm summoning had worked, that ghost image wouldn’t have appeared. So it wasn’t so much an insignificant lizard’s tail as it was a…hm, a doppelganger I guess. Either way, it has nothing to do with me.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke could not stop himself from pressing his forehead against the railing.
Then he let out a meaningless yell. Now that he thought about it, that monster had continued to appear before him with a smile even after being destroyed once in the so-called Secret War.
The White Queen giggled.
“Oh, and the hostage that version of me was playing with was freed as soon as that me was annihilated, so don’t worry. That too has no connection to me.”
“I’d be in serious trouble if that at least wasn’t true.”
“Allllso. I would like you to thank me. Because I selfishly said I wanted to see you, the remnants of Guard of Honor destroyed each other through infighting and couldn’t go into hiding again. Heh heh heh. Basically, summoning me in my pure form isn’t that easy a thing to do.”
“What were you hoping to accomplish with all that?”
“Nothing really. Didn’t I tell you before? Guard of Honor was using me on their own and I had no personal interest in any of it. I didn’t really think of them as belonging to me. Oh, dear☆ Were you worried I would attack you to get back at you for destroying that organization?”
He had not thought that.
The White Queen did not have such blatant plots.
She was simply in love with being in love and that let desire influence her actions. She was so simple that it was in fact impossible to grasp the whole.
“Does that mean you won’t interfere with those two?”
“Heh heh heh. I appreciate that you avoided speaking their names. Yes, I am only interested in you, brother. I have no real reason to pursue someone who has left you.”
“…”
“There’s no need to glare at me like that. This is the scene that leads to the words ‘happily ever after’. Guard of Honor was crushed, so that should be the end of any trouble for those humans’ parents.”
“What do you mean?”
“Didn’t you find it odd that a shrine’s priest would have a gambling addiction? Then there was the secret of one of those twins. And let’s not forget that Guard of Honor tried to create a life-size Repliglass figure as an artificial vessel for me, but kept failing.”
“Are you saying their starting point was set up?”
“The plan was to take everything from them with the power of money. Don’t you think it was lucky Guard of Honor decided to go the peaceful route and didn’t just slaughter them all to steal the Joruri documents?”
Now that it was all over, it was true that some of it may have been lucky.

The Meinokawa Sisters' parents had not been so obsessed with gambling they lost sight of their family. They had been pitiable victims who had ended up making a rigged bet in order to protect their family's lifestyle. Guard of Honor was at the root of it all, but they had been destroyed. Since the daughters had also paid off the debt, it may have been that all the loose ends really had been tied up.
But that depended on if that would be allowed to happen.
"So why are you here?"
"Do I need a reason?" The White Queen laughed. "All the world's members of Guard of Honor gathered here and were destroyed, but there are still plenty of organizations that worship me. I'm sure something else will rise to the surface among them. We may meet again sometime and somewhere, but do what you think best when that time comes."
"If only I could take that as a joke… Government, Illegal, and Freedom are still pretty shaken as they work to clean up after all this and they still treat you like a goddess. People tend to rely on the supernatural when they're feeling weak, so there's a decent chance someone will go too far when it comes to you."
In this case, they would decide Guard of Honor had been behind it all and the White Queen herself was innocent. Personal beliefs with no canon to follow were endlessly flexible. And those people would be entirely oblivious to the fact that they were working against their own best interests.
"Ah ha ha. I'm glad to hear we will have plenty of exciting locations for dates. But to be honest, I think half of the world's chaos would utterly vanish if you became mine, brother."
"Yes, but that's because you're directly or indirectly causing half of the world's chaos," spat out Kyousuke. "And I think the other half has to do with me. Or to be more accurate, all sorts of problems keep coming to the surface because of all the truly skilled summoners and vessels that were lost during that Secret War. Think about Guard of Honor. If those truly skilled people were still alive, the three major powers wouldn't be in this weird stalemate and a large unit would have been sent in to deal with Guard of Honor before they grew this large. …Do you really think it's right for me alone to be happy when I was the one that pulled the trigger that started that?"
That was why Shiroyama Kyousuke continued to fight.
He could not shake off those cursed words of "help me", but he could not call himself a righteous hero.
He was the opposite. He had created the root cause. That weak boy continued to fight because he felt responsible and could not escape it.
"Then why not join forces with me and then use me to save even the other side of the planet, brother?"
"No, that would literally be the end of the world. Half the planet would be destroyed and we'd only have half a planet left."
"I love you so much for seeing it that way, brother☆"

“Besides, you’re *only in love with being in love, so you don’t really care about me, do you?* If I gave in, you’d lose interest in less than a week, just like how people start seeing the negative sides of someone once they start living together. Right now, I know you’re after me, but if that hint were gone, the power to destroy the world really could appear anywhere at any time with no way to predict it. I’d rather avoid that.”
“Heh heh heh. Then should I favorably interpret that at as you at least wanting to keep me around?”
Shiroyama Kyousuke sighed.
“The thing is…I did summon you to this world and sew you here for my own desire.”
“Yes? What about it?”
“That was because I knew I couldn’t kill you on my own, so I wanted to keep you here and cut off your escape. That way, I could get everyone’s help to kill you once and for all. I thought something as powerful as you was nothing more than an evil that would drive both worlds to madness. …But in the end, you acted as a singularity that drew a ton of Materials to this planet. That left our cooperation in shambles and led to that awful Secret War.”
Then what was that about them being lovers?
He may have been a prodigy, but what had been the backbone to building such a great device?
The White Queen thought about all that.

However…
“Perhaps.”
She moved her face in close.
Their lips were only a few centimeters apart.
“But.”
She made it sound obvious.
“I’m sure you will end up ‘saving’ even me in the end.”
That was when the limit arrived.
The Artificial Sacred Ground came undone, the White Queen’s outline vanished, and the poor vessel girl collapsed unconscious at his feet.
“…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke pondered the words of his nemesis for just a moment.
Finally, he turned around and vanished into the crowd.

The two of them parted ways.
Neither of their paths would accept the other.

Facts

- Due to the White Queen’s selfishness, Guard of Honor’s remnants destroyed themselves before they could go into hiding.
- The Meinokawa family was destroyed by their parents’ gambling addiction because Guard of Honor had forced the debt onto them to obtain the Joruri documents to help with their stalled research.
- In the Secret War, Shiroyama Kyousuke and the main force of skilled summoners and vessels tried to truly kill the too-powerful White Queen as a way to save the worlds of man and Material alike. The plan was broken into multiple steps including the personal contact with the White Queen, but it ultimately ended in failure.
- Because the White Queen, who is in love with being in love, is far, far too powerful, she pays no heed to people’s futile resistance.
- Half the problems in the world are caused by the White Queen and the other half are closely connected to Kyousuke. Or at least, Kyousuke believes so and thus he cannot shake off the cursed words of “help me”.
- This is a fairy tale of two opposites, but is not a story of a righteous hero and an evil ruler.

- The battle between those two strongest individuals will continue until one side falls or until one side is saved.

Afterword

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The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“……”
“……”

Afterword
(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)

A new series!!
This is Kamachi Kazuma.
The theme this time was summoning! When you look into magic and sorcery from any part of the world, once things pass a certain line, it starts being about contacting and borrowing the power of a higher intelligent being. (And ultimately either becoming one with them or going to “the other side” as a new member of their group. …All the talk about UFOs isn’t all that different when you get down to it, is it?) But this time I put even more focus on that.

If you’re interested, it might be fun to look into the rose and sigil at the basis of the Blood-Sign style of summoning ceremony. This is also true of magic weapons like wands, cups, swords, and pentacles, but (setting aside the psychological work of sanctifying them) you can make the actual tool from magnets and cellophane and it looks something like a craft made for a school project. (Yes, it looks more like a craft than artwork.) It’s interesting because it demonstrates the idea of things close at hand summoning things that are out of reach.

Due to the summoning theme, I focused this entire novel around (a mistaken usage of) the idea of being reliant on others. The protagonist of Shiroyama Kyousuke is a legendary sort of person, yet he can’t display his true power without a partner, he uses a product of Quad Motors which belonged to the enemy, and his catch phrase was to repeat back what the other person had said earlier.
I think the key to this novel’s summoning theme was to see how cool I could make it look to be reliant on others.

Personally, I think summoning isn’t just about a great power that no human could hope to match; it also emphasizes twisted relationships (e.g. being bound by a contract on parchment or working for the person you accept as your master), so I put a lot of that in the novel too. Everyone was referring to each other like they were family (e.g. Onii-chan, brother, my sister), but if you think about it, the only actual blood relationship was the pair from the flashback. That’s also why the final boss was *the way she was*.
The protagonist has mastered being a summoner and become somewhat Material-like as a result.
The final boss has mastered being a Material and brought her human-like thoughts to the forefront as a result.
I had those two interact because I wanted to express something about the relationship between the summoner and the summoned. For example,

without that amazing skill, he wouldn't have had to see all that. And it isn't just the human that's affected (goes insane?) when they catch a glimpse of a monster. Can't the opposite happen as well? For this, I referenced a lot of myths about crossing between worlds such as Orpheus traveling from earth to the underworld or Samyaza traveling from heaven to earth. My personal impression was that it ends up being too much of a good thing.

As for the Repliglass solders who played the role of the grunts in full-body tights, I added them into the settings because I thought they weren't much different from summoners in that they used human intelligence and technology to efficiently make use of other plants' and animals' structures. That was an experiment to approach the novel's theme from multiple angles, but what did you think?

Now for some internal information. An experimental theme for this novel was to have the series' final boss do a lot from the very beginning and to always be by the protagonist's side. Rather than a plotting rival who is equal to the protagonist, this is a final boss whose power is hopelessly greater than the protagonist's. I wanted to take a protagonist who has a composed look during any battle and show off his adorable human side by having him tremble in fear whenever the ultimate (…or worst?) ex-girlfriend shows up.
In this volume, the final boss's own power was used to defeat her, but can Shiroyama Kyousuke ultimately grow enough to outdo her even though he already seems to have reached his limit spec-wise (since he already ranks near the top). I hope you will stick around to see.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Ikawa Waki-san and my editors Miki-san, Onodera-san, and Anan-san. With the creature-esque Materials, the mecha-like Repliglass soldiers, and the great difference in size between the humans and creatures, this has to have been a pain of a novel to illustrate. Sorry for all the trouble. I hope you will stick with me.
And I give my thanks to the readers. I've started a new series, but did you enjoy it? I hope you can relax and stick around for a while.

And I will end this here.

…I wrote an extra dictionary for all the original summoning terminology, you know?
-Kamachi Kazuma

Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign - Volume 01

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The Unexplored Summon://Blood-Sign

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